LIL LORIMER

BY THEO GIFT

Fayere and fulmus
John Ashford Wise. Esqr

LIL LORIMER.

LIL LORIMER.

A Novel.

By THEO GIFT,

AUTHOR OF

"PRETTY MISS BELLEW," "MAID ELLICE," "A MATTER OF FACT GIRL,"
"VISITED ON THE CHILDREN," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

London:
WARD AND DOWNEY,
12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.
1885.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

London and Bungay:
Richard Clay and Sons, Printers.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME III.

BOOK IV.—*Continued.*

CHAP.		PAGE
II.	FAREWELL TO SOUTH AMERICA	1
III.	LORD ERLSCOURT	20
IV.	AN OLD STORY REVIVED	39
V.	LIL'S FIRST AND LAST RIDE	53
VI.	"THE RIFT IN THE LUTE"	72

BOOK V.

I.	"WE WILL GO HOME"	91
II.	FIRST IMPRESSIONS	110
III.	A NAME FROM THE PAST	212
IV.	THE DAY OF RECKONING	218
V.	GONE!	224
VI.	ON THE BRINK	239
VII.	THE END OF THE SEARCH	340
	CONCLUSION	350

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/lillorimernovel00gift_1

VOLUME III.

LIL LORIMER.

BOOK IV.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER II.

FAREWELL TO SOUTH AMERICA.

"The stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O! for the touch of a vanished hand!
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

Tennyson.

"Any one watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference, or the frozen stare, with which we look at our unintroduced neighbour. Destiny stands by sarcastic with our *dramatis personæ* folded in her hand."—*George Eliot.*

It is easier to imagine than describe the bustle and confusion of the fortnight which ensued between the arrival of the news of Colonel Duncan's death, and the sailing of the vessel which took Max and his young wife from the country of her birth; and certainly if the first fourteen days of her married life had been almost unclouded sunshine, these latter

might be described as a season of perpetual showers. Max was out of doors most of the time, rushing about attending to all sorts of business, counteracting previously-made arrangements, bidding farewells to friends, and seeing about passengers and outfits; while Lil, whose "trousseau" had perforce been almost as meagre in quantity as it was elegant in style, sat over her needle with the other two girls weeping floods of tears, to which they contributed such equally copious streams that not unfrequently Max, coming in suddenly, found three pallid, red-eyed ghosts, curled up in a heap together, with a load of damp needlework in their laps, and incapable of anything but the sobbing answer:

"It's be . . because she's going away s . . s . . so soon!" in answer to his somewhat indignant inquiry of what *was* the matter.

"Why, good heavens! you didn't think you were going to keep her always, did you?" he exclaimed, with very natural anger. "We should have gone away anyhow in a few more weeks to the camp."

"Yes; but we were all to have gone home *first*," said Louie tearfully. "They say there's hardly any cholera left there now, and we had planned that you and she were to have Liz's room, because it's the biggest; and we'd have given a party as soon as ever the officers came back, and I know they'd *all*

have sent her wedding-presents, and oh! there's no fun in getting married at all if the Monte-San-Felipian friends are not to call and see her in her new things; and—and even if you *did* take her to the camp, *we* could have gone to visit her there and stayed with you; and now—now—we sha'n't ever see her again"—with which Louie cast herself face downwards on her pillows and almost howled, while Lil's and Lisbeth's tears flowed in silent sympathy. Max took hold of his wife and lifted her on to her feet, not as gently as usual.

"This is too ridiculous," he said. "Lil, you will make yourself ill if you go on in this way. Upon my word, I think you had better not have married at all if the prospect of living with me instead of your sisters is to cause all this misery. And you always talked as if you *wanted* to see England. Would you rather I went there alone?"

But Lil could not steady her voice enough to answer, and Louie did so for her.

"You might go to England to settle your affairs alone, and come back again," said the irrepressible one boldly. "I don't see, if you are rich now, why you should even go to the camp. You could have a house in town and a quinta at the Aguada. Lil would like it ever so much better, wouldn't you,

Lil? and then she could see us whenever she liked, and be able to entertain all the officers and estancieros, and give jolly parties and picnics and theatricals, as we always planned to do when one of us got married. Oh! it's *too* bad; and I was *beginning* to really like you! I—I almost wish now she had had Pedro. *He* wouldn't have taken her away at any rate."

"*Louie!*" cried Lil faintly; but Max interrupted her.

"And who is 'Pedro', may I ask? I hear a great deal about 'the officers' for whose entertainment and delectation you seem to imagine your sister did me the honour of marrying me; but this is a gentleman whose name I have not yet had the pleasure of hearing. Perhaps Lil will enlighten me; unless indeed he is to be introduced among the pleasant herd of naval and military riff-raff, and brandy drinking sheep-farmers for whom you appear to expect me to keep open house."

"Max," said Lil gently, and with her hand laid on his arm, "don't speak so. Indeed Louie never meant—" but the Elf, who was already in an over-wrought condition, and who had listened to her brother-in-law's outburst with a stare of mingled astonishment and wrath, was not to be so put down. Even her father had never succeeded in awing her into more than temporary silence, and for a *young* man, a

raw new-comer from England, to speak to her sister *so* of their oldest friends was not to be endured.

"Lil!" she exclaimed vehemently, "what do *you* mean? Surely you're not soft enough to let him call your own friends, the men of our set, 'riff-raff'! and to *scold* you too! I wouldn't let any husband in the world scold *me;* and . . and if he does it now when you've got us to take care of you, he'll . . he'll do it much more when you're miles and miles and m-m-miles away, and——"

But this was going too far. Max simply turned on his heel, and walked off into the adjoining room without even condescending to look at the impertinent girl; and Lil, after one reproachful, "Oh! Louie, how could you!" hurried after him, leaving Liz (who had vainly tried to check the *cadette* earlier) to remain behind, and administer such a reprimand to that fiery and turbulent young person, as she had not experienced for some time.

"You've done it now," she remarked austerely, "and I hope you're satisfied. From this day forth he'll hate us heartily, and soft and good-natured as you've thought him, I can tell you one thing that I found out even in the few days I was at Monte San Felipe: he's a good hater! If you had any shadow of hope that he would ever ask us over to see Lil, or bring her back to see us, put it out of your mind now

and for ever. It will be more than I expect if she is even let *write* to us in the future. We have said 'good-bye' to her now, Loo, and it's your doing."

In which Liz only said the truth, and Louie knew it. She was sufficiently frightened and subdued indeed to pull herself up on her couch the next time she saw Max (which was not till the evening, for Lil and he had dined out), and say in her prettiest manner:

"Brother Max, please come here and forgive me. I was awfully naughty to you this morning, and Liz has given me a good rowing for it; but this hateful foot of mine, and the thought of Lil's going, made me cross, and—but I didn't mean a word of it, Max, so please forgive and be friends again."

"Forgive you? Oh, certainly," said Max, but so icily that poor Loo felt a sudden sinking at her heart, and dropped her grown-up, coquettish manner on the instant.

"I really am sorry," she said quite humbly. "You—I hope you won't bear malice, Max," and Max answered with cool, unsmiling courtesy:

"My dear Louisa, what an idea! Malice against a young lady for an unguarded speech which she will never have an opportunity of repeating! I hope I am not so childish. Pray let us drop the subject."

He passed on as he spoke, without even seeming to see

the hand which Louie, making a great effort over herself, had held out; and there the matter ended. There were no more tears, visible ones at any rate, and not another unpleasant word among the four; while Lil was even painfully anxious to be loving and conciliatory to all, and make it appear as if no breach had occurred in their previous harmony; but the breach was there all the same, and the very effort marked the fact that Lil, as Max Lorimer's wife, was something more than the old number two of the Hardy girls, and Liz and Loo's sister. The former was right; they had said their real good-byes to her even before that final hour when, in the golden sunlight of a summer's afternoon, and surrounded by a whole *posse* of well-wishing friends, the three clung together on the steamer's deck in a last, passionate hug.

Five minutes later, and two of them were only represented by a couple of damp white handkerchiefs fluttering wildly from a small steam-launch in the distance, while Lil alone stood like a statue on the receding poop of the huge mail-packet, her hands tightly locked together, her eyes straining, straining, straining through a mist of tears for the last glimpses of that boatful of black figures; of the fair white city with its thousand miradors and twin Cathedral towers gleaming in the golden sunlight; the low green shore; the

Mount with the lighthouse on it standing out boldly against an azure sky; the blue, land-locked harbour crowded with slender masts and gay bunting—all fading, fading faster and faster with each revolution of the paddle-wheels, until they blended and melted away in the rosy glow of evening as the good ship *Cadiz* steamed merrily out upon its homeward way.

* * * * * *

"Doubtless" (as Bishop Berkeley once said of strawberries), "doubtless God might have invented a worse evil than sea-sickness; but doubtless God never *did*." Granted, however, that that evil *is* the worst to which flesh is or can be heir to, it must be allowed that it is also a cure for many other minor ones, and remarkably so for those affecting the sentimental or spiritual side of our nature. He who, in the worst agonies of sea-sickness, would not be content to hear that father and mother, wife and child—aye, and mother-in-law, and property in fund and scrip also—were safely deposited at the bottom of the sea, so he could but stand on dry and steady land again, does not know what those agonies are; and heartless as it may sound, Lil Lorimer formed as good an exemplification of this fact as any other mortal born to the possession of a stomach which was never designed by nature to be worn inside out.

As she stood, drowned in tears, watching the last flutter of those mournfully waving handkerchiefs, the last glimpses of her gay and well-beloved home, Lil felt seriously that she hated Max for taking her away; hated herself for going; hated the great steamer ploughing the waves on its onward course; the captain and passengers; the country to which they were travelling—everything and all things but Liz and Loo and the friends she was leaving behind her. This actively unchristian state of mind, however, barely lasted one short hour. At the end of that time they had met the full breast of the Atlantic waves, the breeze had freshened to a capful of wind, and Lil had—disappeared! She was down in her cabin, "a worm and no (wo)man", and for the next ninety-six hours the world saw her no more; and Liz, Loo, and home, Monte San Felipe, its friends and gaieties, everything and every one but such ministering angels as the stewardess and Max, staggering about with impotent glasses of champagne for her restoration, were lost in the horrors of sea-sickness, and the one consuming desire to be dropped overboard as near to the hungriest shark as could be conveniently managed. On the evening of the fourth day, the wind lulled and the ship steadied; she was able to drink a cup of strong coffee and eat something, and afterwards to let Max carry her up on deck and deposit her on a

heap of shawls and cushions where she could feel a delicious breeze blowing in her face, and see long miles of dark-blue, low-ridged waves stretching away on every side; and fellow-passengers, all more or less seedy-looking, asking eagerly of the gold-banded officials, if "they were *sure* to be in next day".

The answer must have been favourable, for Lil awoke next morning with the sensation that they were running on an even keel; and a few minutes later, in answer to an eager summons from her husband, who was up already, she stood beside him on the deck bathed in the early sunlight, sweet scents of earth and leaves and flowers blowing towards her across an expanse of water blue and clear and glassy as a sheet of sapphire glass; mountains clothed in palm-trees on this side and that; fairy-like islets, mere nosegays of verdure, hanging like living jewels between "the blue above and the blue below"; in the distance long ranges of violet hills, their summits still wrapt in floating silver mists, while below them one lovely bay after another opened out with beach of snow-white sand fringed round with purple palms; then the Sugar-Loaf and the mighty Corcovado towering wedge-shaped over the entrance to *the* Bay itself; and then in another minute they were within it, the most glorious harbour in the whole world, with the city of Rio Janeiro nestled like a gorgeous,

tropical-hued flower in its green and leafy curves; and as Lil leant back upon her husband's arm and turned her shining eyes to him, big with a bewilderment of delight and rapture which she had never even dreamt of, all memory of past sickness, pains, and partings, seemed to disappear in one breathless "*Oh*, Max!" to which Max, well pleased at the sight of her delight, answered cheerfully:

"Yes, rather stunning, isn't it? I thought the Brazils would take your breath away; and, by Jove, it's given you some colour into the bargain! Now then, run down and make yourself lovely. We shall breakfast at anchor to-day, and *I'm* ravenous."

From that moment all the rest of the voyage was one long, delightful, ever-varying, and always enjoyable holiday, with no sea-sickness, no wishings for death; and only such natural regrets as were expressed in the long letters which Lil *would* send to her sisters from every port, and which might have been condensed into—"If only you were with me too! Everything is so strange and beautiful, and it is such fun: Max so dear and nice, and every one on board as kind as they can be. I *can't* be sorry I came; but oh! if you could only be here to enjoy it also!"

In truth, Lil would have been hard to please if she had not enjoyed herself. The passage was an exceptionally fine one;

the heat not *so* scorching (to her well-tempered blood) as to be unendurable when reclining in an American chair under the snowy, wide-spread awning. Their fellow-passengers vied with each other in attentions to the lovely young matron, who in her capacity of bride had the seat of honour at the captain's right hand, and the first choice as to what tunes were to be played by the band, or what amusements to be in vogue for the evening. Each port they anchored at was an excuse for deluging her with offerings of flowers and fruit, tropical birds, and feather ornaments; and Max himself made the most gallant and devoted of husbands, never absent for many minutes from her side, and ever ready to read aloud, walk up and down, or enlighten her mind as to the various places and objects of interest with which they came in contact. It was a new and wonderful experience to Lil, and even Max seemed in some ways a new person, older, wiser, and more important, by reason of having "done it all before", knowing all about it, and being able to take care of, and instruct and direct her, instead of being, as heretofore, the one to be taught this, and explained that, and soothed and guided through all the imbroglios into which his quick temper, and ignorance of the habits and customs of those with whom he had had to deal, had been only too apt to lead him.

Now, all this was reversed. He was strong where she was weak, experienced where she was ignorant, and doubly important by reason of being a bridegroom going home to a good fortune, and by having the most beautiful woman on board beyond all count for his wife. It was the most delightful position imaginable to him; and he adapted himself to it with a charming, good-tempered arrogance to which, by good fortune, his fellow-passengers submitted with far more good-will than had been the case among keen-witted Uruguayan girls and republican sheep-farmers; and which was only ruffled by occasional spurts of jealousy when Lil allowed herself to be beguiled into too long a promenade on the moonlit deck, or to forgetting the luncheon-bell in an interesting conversation with one or other of their male companions. Then, indeed, there was an angry storm-flash, or perhaps a fit of sulkiness worse still; but easily soothed away by Lil's winning sweetness, and ending in reconciliations which not only left them more like lovers than ever, but had the effect of enlivening the monotony always too much attendant on every ocean voyage.

There was plenty of excitement, however, on the day when they dropped anchor at Lisbon, where Lil got her first sight of Europe, and where most of the passengers (and Max among them) expected to find letters awaiting them from

friends at home, and to be able to telegraph to the latter their safety so far, and the approximate date of their arrival in England.

There was no letter for Lil: but she had hardly expected one, not knowing even where her father was; so she had room to concentrate all her feelings of disappointment on the fact that they were not to be allowed to land, owing to the stigma of having come from a cholera-infected country. However, even the sight of the crowded, cream-coloured houses and dark-red roofs of old Lisbon, with the green slopes of Cintra rising in the background, had something in it wonderfully fascinating to her, and she was leaning over the bulwarks gazing out at it over a crowd of small boats laden with fragrant oranges and fresh flowers and vegetables, which the swarthy, red-capped Portuguese boatmen were holding up to the passengers, when Max, who had been reading his letters at a little distance, came over to her holding out one in his hand, and said:

"Sit down, Lil, I've heaps of news for you; and you don't want to buy anything of those ragamuffins. See, here's a letter for you."

"For me!" said Lil, wonderingly; then—"Oh! Max, is it from papa? He *has* heard, then, and written to you. Oh!"—

Max burst out laughing.

"He has done nothing of the sort, so don't excite yourself. I declare, Lil, you are quite pale. Can't you realise that you have other relations now besides your father?"

"But, Max, he has never told us anything of our other relations. You know I have told you I don't even know who they are——"

"You've been told of this one at any rate, and you'll soon see and know her. Why, you dear beautiful goose, can't you guess who it is? My sister!"

"Your—Oh! Miss Duncan, your step-sister," said Lil slowly, her eagerness perceptibly lessened. "I forgot she would know you were coming. And you wrote to her that you were married. Is she — does she seem very much vexed?"

Max laughed again.

"Vexed? No, why should she be? On the contrary, she says she is very glad to hear I was lucky enough to find a guardian angel in my wanderings. Don't you think she ought to be?"

"But I thought—dear Max, how nicely you flatter!" said Lil, giving him a little rosy smile; "I thought your step-sister did not care about you; that she had always taken her horrid father's side, and been gloomy and sanctimonious and unkind

to you even when you were in trouble. You have never said very much about her; but I certainly gathered that much from what you did tell me. And oh! did she not even refuse to bid you good-bye before you left England? That alone made me think her a most cruel, heartless woman."

There is a saying by some old poet that,

> "*Man is never lost to grace*
> *While conscience blushes from his face;*"

and, sunburnt as Max was at that moment, conscience blushed so vividly through the brown that he was fain to rise from the camp-stool, astride which he had been sitting, and look out to shore as he answered, somewhat confusedly:

"Oh, as to *that*, I don't suppose the old Colonel would let her see me. In fact, he told me he wouldn't; and, after all, Lil, a girl thinks it her duty to hang by her father, especially when he's the only parent she's got, and when she's been brought up with old-fashioned notions about obedience, and filial affection, and all that. I'm afraid I was bad enough to be rather wroth with her about it in my wild oats days; but for all that" (with some irritation), "I never said anything about her being a 'cruel, heartless woman', and I should be very sorry if you thought her so. Aren't you even going to read her letter! It's not every woman, I can tell you, who would write as kindly as she does about a sister-in-law she

has never seen, and doesn't know; and who is coming to supersede her in the house where she has been mistress for five years or more."

Lil looked a little bewildered. There is always something rather crushing after having given our sympathy to a large extent to find that there was no occasion for it; and it certainly was a fact that Max Lorimer's way of alluding to his step-sister in the early days of their acquaintance had led her to look on that lady as anything but amiable, and to expend a great deal of pity on the young man for being so destitute of kindly or affectionate relations. Was it not for that very cause that she had tried to be a sister to him herself? But fortunately at this moment a thought came to her to solve the puzzle, and redeem her husband's character for consistency.

"Max," she said, looking up at him with her pleasantest smile, "you are a dear, generous humbug, and I love you all the better for it. Do you think I can't see through all that fine speech, and understand as well as if you had told me, that it is just because you are master in your own house at last, and your step-sister dependent on you, that you are determined to forget all the unkindness she and her father ever showed you, and make me forget it too! Of course I will read her letter, and I am very glad if she is going to be

pleasant to me; but it is *you* who are kind and good, dear, and I like your notions of affection the best." With which, and a little defiant nod as much as to say, "I am not to be taken in," Lil turned to the epistle in question, and began to read it. The first sight of the heading, however—"*Craig-darroch, Ross-shire*"—gave her a curious, startled feeling. Where had she heard that word, "*Craig-darroch*," before?—but the answer did not come immediately; and something in the tone, even more than the words of the letter—a womanly tenderness and simplicity—struck her instead with a feeling of some compunction for her late harsh judgment.

"Miss Duncan does write nicely, certainly," she said, as she gave the letter back to her husband; "and, poor thing! she seems to miss her father very much. I like the way in which she asks you not to think of him unkindly now he is gone. But who are the 'kind friends' she is with; and what does she mean by 'I am sure you will not have forgotten what I asked you for in my last'?"

Max started and uttered an exclamation of real annoyance.

"That? By Jove, and I *did* forget all about it! But in any case it was impossible, and I must tell her so. One *couldn't* have gone burrowing in a beastly cemetery in cholera time, could one?"

"A cemetery?" Lil looked puzzled.

"Yes; don't you remember my telling you of that poor fellow Melville, who was murdered one Carnival time out in your parts? You didn't remember much about him, I think; only saw him once, you said; but the reason I asked you then was that I had just learnt that my poor sister Alice was engaged to him; though in consequence of my being away from home at the time, and of his dying so soon after, she hadn't been able to tell me of it before. It's with his people—General and Lady Melville of Craig-darroch—that she's staying now; and you see she says they want her to make her home altogether with them; but what she asked me to do was to find out his grave, and bring her a few leaves or even blades of grass from it. Women have these fancies, and I'm afraid the poor old girl half broke her—— Why, *Lil!* Lil, what's the matter? The man's all right. Don't be frightened." They were still leaning over the bulwarks, and one of the Portuguese fruit-sellers in a boat beneath them had missed his footing and stumbled over a thwart, sending a shower of small red oranges floating on the waves; but Lil must have been very nervous. *She had fainted away!*

CHAPTER III.

LORD ERLSCOURT.

"I am sprited with a fool."—*Cymbeline*, Act II. Scene iii.

"A certain lord, neat and trimly drest,
Fresh as a bridegroom, and his chin new reaped
Showed like a stubble land at harvest home;
He was perfumed like a milliner;
. . . . . .
. . . and still he smiled and talked."
Henry IV., Act I. Scene iii.

"There's nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so."
Hamlet, Act II. Scene ii.

THE month of March in London is so proverbially bleak and grey and gloomy, that it is no wonder if Lil did not derive any very favourable impressions from her first sight of the metropolis about which were woven in her mind so many childish fancies and associations. From the moment, too, of leaving Lisbon and entering the Bay of Biscay the voyage had lost all its pleasantness, and three days of buffetting about, battened-down hatches, and cross seas had so pulled her down that even when they were safe on land and travelling to Waterloo as fast as a South-Western express could

carry them, she was too much weakened to care to look out at the cold, leafless looking country, or do anything but shiver and nestle against Max, while he wrapped her round in all the shawls and rugs he could get hold of, and laughed outright at her miserable face and almost childish terror when they rushed into the first tunnel she had ever experienced.

"Upon my soul, Lil," he said, lifting the pale face which had buried itself in the darkness against his shoulder, "I didn't know you were such a coward! A girl, too, who would have ridden unprotected among a lot of loose, cut-throat Spaniards for a couple of hundred miles, to be afraid in a first-class railway-carriage! And do you know, ma'am, you are looking almost *plain?* I do hope Erlscourt won't call on us this evening. He would think I have been romancing."

Lil joined in the hope most sincerely. Just at present she was thinking most (so far as the east wind and biting cold would let her think at all) of whether she should see her father that evening. Max had received a very cordial letter from Lord Erlscourt at Lisbon, and had telegraphed to him asking him to engage rooms for them at Almond's Hotel, Clifford Street; and at Southampton they had been met by another note from his lordship saying that he had done so, and welcoming them to England; but there had been no word or line from Mr. Hardy; and Lil did not know whether to put

down his silence to the depths of his displeasure against her, or to the simple fact that he had not received their telegram.

Since sending it off, and since the letter which showed how kindly the dreaded Miss Duncan had taken the news of her brother's marriage, Lil had felt much less apprehensive as to the nature of her meeting with her father. He *must* be glad to see her, she argued, and know that she was happy, when she was so anxious to see *him*, and when the mere thought that he was there before her, made the country she had just landed in seem so much less strange and unhomelike to her. After all, was she not his daughter, and one who had never been rebellious or undutiful to him in all her life save in these two affairs? And it was not as if he were a cruel or even an unkind father in general; only cold and reserved. His heart would surely have melted to her now, his own child, the only one belonging to him in a strange land, and when she had asked and obtained forgiveness there would be as much for him to ask as for her to tell of Liz and Loo and Max himself, and that terrible cholera time, when no one knew from day to day who would be the next victim.

She was thinking of it all when, after having rested and dined, she sat over a big fire in one of the private sitting-rooms at the hotel, building bright pictures of the meeting and reunion, and wondering how her father would look, and

still more how he and Max would like one another: wondering too a little at the resemblance between her feelings now in a fashionable hotel crowded with other guests and servants, in the very heart of the mightiest metropolis in the world, and full of life and bustle and business, to those which had overwhelmed her on that first evening in the deserted house in Monte San Felipe, with nought but closed and pest-marked houses, and silent, grass-grown streets around her. Perhaps it was because she felt almost equally lonely and tired; and also that the hotel with its well-fitting doors, noiselessly-moving domestics, and softly-carpeted corridors, had such a quiet, almost tomb-like effect after the turmoil on board ship, or even the great, noisy hotels abroad, with their clattering marble stairs, huge, echoing *patios*, and waiters screaming French and Spanish at the tops of their voices to one another.

Even the room she was in, though a good-sized one in reality, gave her something of the idea of a padded box, the ceilings were so low, and the doors and windows—to her unaccustomed eyes—so absurdly tiny.

"How *do* people manage to breathe here in hot weather?" she had said to Max at dinner. "But perhaps it never is really hot. Well, at any rate the fires are. Did you ever see such a big one as this? And fancy having them in the bed-rooms too! It hardly seems safe in such little rooms, and

so full of furniture; but I suppose people never do get burnt up in the night, do they?"

Max laughed heartily. Indeed, Lil's exclamations and comments (especially the idea of any one finding a *redundancy* of furniture in a hotel bed-room) amused him immensely when they were alone, though he felt obliged to caution her against indulging in them before the waiters or chamber-maids, lest the latter should take them for newly-arrived Yankees or colonials, and not treat them with proper respect; but as soon as dinner was over, he had offered to set her mind at rest by going in search of her father at the address to which they had written.

"Besides, I must just look in at the club and see Erlscourt," he added. "He said in his letter, you know, that he would be there this evening *in case* he was wanted for anything; and I ought to thank him for finding us such comfortable quarters, and for all his kindness. I owe him a pot of money, you know."

"Of money, do you?" said Lil. "Did he lend it you when you were at Monaco together?"

"Monaco? No, you little goose, but for the expenses of the last two months. Denman advanced it, but it was on Erlscourt's authority; so you must mind and be very civil to him."

"Oh! I will," said Lil; "he must be very kind, because

he couldn't have known you would get rich and be able to pay him soon. I will thank him."

"No, no, don't do that; women are never supposed to know anything about loans or money matters; it doesn't look well. And don't talk about my being 'rich', Lil. Two thousand a year is poverty—in our set."

Lil wondered what "our set" was; but Max was gone before she could ask, and she sat by the fire, as I have said, enjoying the novel sensation of gazing into its red, glowing depths and toasting her toes, "just like people in Christmas story-books", she said to herself whimsically, until the heat had driven out even her chilliness, and she got up, and drawing aside the heavy crimson curtains which hid the window, peeped out timidly into the unknown world outside.

The street in which the hotel itself stood was very quiet; but by standing in a corner of the window she could get a tolerably good glimpse of a fragment of Bond Street, light almost as day with the glitter of a thousand gas-lamps, and crowded with people, horses, and vehicles passing and repassing each other in an endless confused stream. There was a strange roar and rumble in the air too—a roll and murmur as of hundreds of voices, broken now and then by some shout or cry sharper than the others, and which gradually raised a feeling of positive alarm in her, by suggest-

ing that there might be some great revolution going on at that moment in the city. Such numbers and numbers of people could surely never be out of doors together for any other reason; and yet they did not seem angry, or excited. They walked along composedly enough; and there were women and children among them, and no soldiers or even signs of arms! Still it was a rather terrifying discovery that neither the window at which she was standing, nor any other in the street, were protected by iron bars like those in Monte San Felipe, *in case* of any outbreak in the streets; and when the velvet-footed waiter came in next, bringing her a cup of tea, and asking if she would like anything more, she could not refrain from asking him if *anything was the matter* outside; anything going on in Government affairs to excite the people, or cause an uprising: but the stare of blank incomprehension on the man's face, followed by an astonished negative, made her feel somewhat ashamed of herself. After all, had not Frank Melville and Max both told her that there were no revolutions in England? And yet surely—*surely* that terrible roar and shouting of voices could not be lifted up always and always, and for nothing! If anything bad was going on, she hoped fervently that neither her father nor Max were out in it; and it was with intense relief that she saw the door open at last to admit the

latter, though when she saw that no one followed him, there was something so piteous in her unspoken glance of inquiry that he made haste to answer it.

"Your father isn't here, love. It's a great disappointment for you, but you must console yourself by thinking how much worse it would have been if he had been in town, and only too angry with us to write, as I know you feared. He has left England, Lil. When he got the news of our engagement, and the height to which the cholera epidemic had reached in Monte San Felipe, he got too anxious about you all to remain here any longer, and sailed by a Liverpool vessel for South America just twelve days before we left there. We must have passed him on the way. Lil, my darling, don't cry so. Isn't your husband enough for you? You used to say so. And I'm going to be so good to you."

But though Lil was sure of that, she cried very bitterly all the same. Something told her that she should never see her father again now; and only a few minutes back there had been almost as much dread as joy in her anxiety for their meeting. The thought of that gave an added touch of remorse to her tears.

* * * * * *

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock on the following morning when a tap came to the door of the Lorimers'

sitting-room. Lil was at her old place by the window, looking out for Max, who had gone out early to see his lawyers, and might be expected to return now at any moment. She was still in her dressing-gown (not from laziness, for in the joy of dressing on "terra firma" again she had done her hair with more than her usual elaboration, and had even put on a pair of diamond earrings, Max's present, in honour of the new bonnet he had promised to take her out to buy), but simply because that garment, a very dressy one of pale pink flannel, much adorned with lace frillings and silken sash-ribbons and embroideries, was warmer than any gown she as yet possessed; and when the knock came at the door she only answered, "*Entre!*" in her usual manner, and did not even turn her head, thinking it was sure only to be the waiter come to look at the fire. The intruder did not speak or go away, however, and becoming suddenly conscious that he was still standing in the doorway, she was just turning to ask what he wanted, when she heard him say, in a very unwaiter-like voice, and with something of a lisp, "I have made a mistake."

Lil whisked away from the window with great quickness, and saw standing a little way from her a young man extremely small and slim in figure, enveloped in a brown great-coat lined with costly furs, with a head as smooth and as flaxen

as a baby's, a large eye-glass in one eye, a pinch of soft white down on the upper lip; and a chin just retreating enough to give the childishly impertinent little face to which it belonged a certain air of appealing weakness.

Not a terrifying vision to a tall and well-developed young woman, accustomed to nearly all varieties of the genus man; and Lil found herself unable to resist a smile when, waving a reassuring hand, as small and daintily gloved as a girl's, to her, the young gentleman blandly observed:

"Pray don't be alarmed. I came to call on some friends of mine—a Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer. The clerk below *said* No. 11; but I must have made a mistake."

"Oh no, you are quite right. I am Mrs. Lorimer," said Lil frankly, though blushing a little, as she had not yet got out of the habit of doing when speaking of herself by her new name; then coming forward and holding out her hand while her mind queried wonderingly if he was some one's little boy whom she had known in Monte San Felipe, and who had been sent to England to be educated.

"But *are* you a friend of mine? I don't remember you; though I have no doubt I ought to do so."

"So much for Lorimer's power of describing his most devoted friend," said the little visitor quietly; "but he always was a clod where sentiment was concerned. Perhaps I am

wronging him, however, I don't think you *can* be Mrs. Max Lorimer, . . . unless you are his mother; and I thought she was dead."

"I certainly am not Max's mother," said Lil, quite unable to resist a merry laugh at the idea; "and I believe I know who you are now," a bright flash of intelligence coming into her eyes; "you are Lord Erlscourt."

"Oh yes, *I* am Erlscourt," said the young nobleman, with a sort of plaintive irritability which implied that that was a secondary matter. "But—but you are really Max's wife, then: the one he married out in that savage place?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'that savage place'," said Lil with dignity. "*We* were married in Monte San Felipe. Won't you sit down, Lord Erlscourt? —I expect Max in every moment."

Lord Erlscourt complied, but more as if he were compelled to drop into a chair from failing strength than in the ordinary conventional manner.

"I must believe you," he said very mournfully, and with a look of the deepest unhappiness, "for I'm sure you wouldn't deceive me. I'm very young, you know, and indeed, now I think of it, I believe Monkey-I-don't-know-how-much *was* the name of the—the—the *kraal* where Max got married. Excuse me if I don't pronounce the words quite rightly. I've

been reading up South Africa for the last week on purpose; but my head isn't strong, and I get a little mixed sometimes."

"You will get very mixed if you read up much more," said Lil, laughing, "seeing that it is not Africa, but South America, that I come from."

"America! Is it really? Well now, you know, that's too bad, for the book cost me sixpence at a lending library, and I've gone through two thick volumes already, not to speak of a perfectly fearful amount of B. and S. to keep me up under them. I thought there was something wrong, though, all the time, for I couldn't find a word about Indians; and I felt sure Max didn't say he had married a Boer woman or a negress."

"I hope he didn't. Did he tell you he had married an Indian, Lord Erlscourt? If so, he was being very rude to me, and taking you in."

"Oh, he's certainly taken *me* in," said his lordship dolorously. "Of course, he told me all about it: that he had married a real, full-blooded Monkey-I-don't-know how-muchian, and that she was a queen among women—the women there, I suppose,—and a lot more. I actually went down to the Crystal Palace (it's a very expensive journey, and a beastly line) to look at the native models there, and get into the spirit of the thing. I was afraid, otherwise,

that I might feel shy, don't you know. But most of the Aborigines there—the ladies at least—had little things made of skins, or wampum, on—the men mostly had skin only, but that's a detail — and I made *sure* you would wear wampum."

"I am so sorry to disappoint you," said Lil gaily. She had felt rather embarrassed at first at being discovered in her dressing-gown; but had comforted herself on second thoughts with the innocent reflection that a "boy like that" wouldn't be likely to guess it was one; and that Max had told her only at breakfast-time that she looked seductively pretty in it. She rather thought Lord Erlscourt *did* think her pretty, and was not sorry for it, seeing that he was Max's best friend. Besides, he was such an absurd youth it was impossible to feel shy with him.

"You will have to take me to the Crystal Palace one day," she went on with girlish gaiety, "and show me the lady with the wampum, so that I may know at least what I *ought* to be like. There is so much I have to see. When you came in I was watching for Max, for he has promised to take me to Regent Street this morning to buy a bonnet. Liz—my eldest sister, I mean—used to wear one sometimes to make her look older, and more like the head of the family; but I have never had anything but hats and mantillas; and Max says a

married woman in England *must* wear a bonnet, especially on Sundays."

"He is perfectly right," said Lord Erlscourt gravely. "It is an indispensable adjunct of the Sabbath. Married women come to breakfast in their bonnets in the morning, and never put them off until the last thing at night. The bonnet is indeed the chief bulwark of English Protestant matronhood; but I forgot——of course *you* are not a Protestant, Mrs. Lorimer."

"Indeed, I am," said Lil rather indignantly. "What else should I be?"

"Well, really—a—you know, I thought the natives out there were either fire-worshippers or—or papists at any rate. I know I've read about them somewhere in a book called 'The last of the——' No, not of the Mohicans, *they* belonged to the 'Big Spirit and hunting-grounds' business—the Incas, I think it was; but anyhow, papists or fire-worshippers, it comes to much the same thing, doesn't it? They both go in for roasting those who don't agree with them."

"My younger sister would say that is a performance other people can be guilty of sometimes," said Lil, with very pretty dryness, and a bright glance. Lord Erlscourt dropped his eye-glass, and sat up looking quite excited.

"You don't *mean* to say you can talk slang!" he exclaimed joyously. "How very delightful! Now in all those dreadful

books about the Aborigines I never came on one instance of that. Some of them could use the toes of the right foot as a hand, and—but I dare say you could do that too. Wish *I* could! Would be awfully useful when one drops anything, don't you know."

"The toes of *which* foot?" asked Lil, glancing downwards at her little pointed shoe. "But, Lord Erlscourt, you are too bad to make game of me so. I think I ought to be angry—— Oh! Max, is that you?"

"I have been kept longer than I thought," said Max as he came in. "Ah, Erlscourt, this is kind. How d'you do? I guessed you'd be here, and hurried home on purpose; but I see you have done without an introduction. I hope Mrs. Lorimer has made you welcome."

"He made himself so beforehand by being so friendly to you, *amigo*," said Lil very prettily; then with a playful frown: "but he has not been at all friendly to me. He has been chaffing me all the time just as if I was a—a *midshipman!* and what do you think he was suggesting about my feet when you came in?"

"About—your feet!" repeated Max with very perceptible surprise; but in the same moment he had become aware of two displeasing circumstances—one, that Lil was still in the *déshabille* in which he had left her, and the other, that

Lord Erlscourt was regarding her with somewhat less than conventionally veiled admiration. His brow clouded over on the instant.

"Had you not better go and get dressed, my dear?" he said rather sharply. "I dare say you have excused yourself to Erlscourt already for having been caught *en déshabille*. Of course your trunks are not unpacked yet. I suppose you were busy at them when he——"

"Oh no, I wasn't. I was looking out of the window here for you," said Lil with her customary frankness, and thinking how stupid Max was to point out that it was not a dress she had on—"but my things are all unpacked, and I will go and get ready now, if you will amuse Lord Erlscourt in my absence. And—oh, Max, won't you ring for some wine and cake?"

But Lord Erlscourt made haste to declare that he never took anything between breakfast and lunch. In fact he was due then at another appointment; and as he had now made the acquaintance of his friend's wife, he must hurry off to keep it, and not delay any longer the choosing of that Sabbatical bonnet. Could he do anything for her, however, go and warn the milliners, for instance, that she was coming, so that they might put on their prices accordingly? The poor things had so little chance in the general way of making even

farthing profits under the grinding hand of the British female aristocracy, that it would be a real charity to throw a little pleasurable custom in their way.

He went off blinking amiably through his eye-glass, and leaving Lil laughing, and Max a little inclined to be cross. It was all very well for Erlscourt to make a fool of himself —he always did; but you might go too far in that sort of thing; and it would never do to allow even him to approach the newly-made Mrs. Lorimer with undue freedom. It was her fault, however, for laughing at everything he said, and for offering him refreshments at that time of the morning, a thing people "*never* did now" (Lil privately thought people very inhospitable); and more especially for receiving him at all in that attire. He read her quite a little lecture indeed on the ways of "good society" in these particulars; and Lil listened with half-amused, half-puzzled submission: wondering how it was that Max seemed to have grown so much older, graver, and more formal from the moment of their landing in England; and instead of rejoicing in his new freedom and independence, to be eager to regulate all their conduct by the opinions of "other people". She knew that unmarried girls and young men in their tutelage had to submit to this bondage; but for *married* people, independent ladies and gentlemen of full age, not to be allowed to have "ways" and

opinions of their own, outside the mere boundary of right and wrong, seemed to her truly absurd. Why should she not laugh when she was amused, or be hospitable when she was inclined? But perhaps the lawyers had been worrying poor old Max. He was always given to making mountains out of mole-hills when vexed. She ran away as soon as she was set free, and got herself ready for her first shopping excursion with almost childish glee. Yet after all Max made her take off the ear-rings which she had put on, out of compliment to him, and to impress the milliners. He said English ladies didn't wear diamonds of a morning!

Lord Erlscourt in the mean time had gone away almost as much puzzled as he was fascinated by Lil. He had expected to meet a raw, shy, colonial girl, pretty perhaps, innocent very likely; but uninformed, ill-dressed, awkward, and probably speaking with some dreadful Yankee or colonial twang—some one, in fact, whom it would be an act of generosity to poor old Max (the unlucky beggar was always getting himself into complications) to patronise and be kind to; but instead, he had found himself confronted by an exquisitely beautiful, perfectly graceful, and self-possessed young lady, speaking with a pretty foreign accent, and attired in the elegant *negligé* of a *dame du demi-monde* on the stage; but who received him with the easy, well-bred frankness of an

old friend, and a fund of innocent, girlish fun ready to ripple over on the smallest provocation. The contradictions puzzled him.

"By Jove, she's a lovely creature," he said to himself, "and Lorimer's a lucky fellow to have secured her; but who, and *what* the deuce can she be? I ain't quite a fool, and *I* believe she's all right. There's *something* about her that girls who aren't innocent can't put on; but I know a dozen fellows who, if they'd seen her this morning, would have sworn Max had found her in St. John's Wood, or behind the scenes of the Variétés. Hanged if I don't think I'll go out to South America myself!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN OLD STORY REVIVED.

"Now say they thus, whan Walter is agon,
Than shall the blood of Jauicle succede,
And ben our lord, for other han we none:
Swiche wordes sayn my peple, it is no drede,
Wel ought I of swiche murmur taken hede."

Chaucer (*'The Clerkes Tale'*).

"L'obstination et l'ardeur d'opinion sont les plus sures preuves de la bétise. Est il rien certain, résolu, dedaigneux, contemplatif, grâve, sérieux, comme—un âne!"—*Montaigne.*

Other people began to question *who* Lil was before long, and the young lady herself among them.

"I must have relations here," she said to Max, "perhaps living in London and wanting to know about *me.* Papa never talked of them, but that was most probably because he did not think we were likely to come to England and know them; and indeed Liz once said she believed he and they were not on good terms; but it seems unnatural to be here and not know who my own uncles, aunts, and cousins are; or, if I have any! I wish we could find out, or that papa would write and tell me."

But, oddly enough, it was Max who found out the mystery by himself, and when he did so he told Lil nothing at all. It happened in this way.

He was looking in at the window of Graves's print-shop at the corner of Pall Mall one day, when he found himself accosted by an old friend of his mother's, a Berkshire baronet and landowner, who greeted him very cordially, congratulated him on his marriage and accession to the old place, and declared that he must call on Mrs. Lorimer on the earliest opportunity.

"She's a foreigner, though, isn't she? Now, why couldn't you have stayed at home and fallen in love with one of our Berkshire lasses, as an Englishman should? But there! they tell me this one is the prettiest creature that has come to this country for the last ten years, so I suppose you'll give that as an excuse, eh? is it a true one?"

"Come and see for yourself, Sir Peter; Lilian will like to know you, and she is not a foreigner at all, but only an English girl from abroad," said Max, well pleased. He was rather proud of his wife's pretty name in full, and liked to use it when possible. The old gentleman took it up rather quickly.

"Lilian, eh? Is that what she's called? Ah dear, how old some things make one feel! I haven't known a girl of that name for—let me see—something like thirty years;

and a lovely creature *she* was, if you like; though came to the saddest grief almost before she was a woman, poor thing. Dear, dear, I wonder *what* became of her in the end, and of that blackguard who ran away with her—Jones or Hardy, as I believed he called himself afterwards."

"*Hardy?*" said Max quickly. He was conscious of changing colour, and of an uncomfortable sensation in his throat; but, after all, the name was not an uncommon one, it might be only a coincidence, and in any case it was better to have it out with Sir Peter, who was one of his oldest and kindest friends.

"What was the affair you allude to?" he asked, trying to speak lightly and easily. "And is the lady alive now? My wife's name was Hardy—Lilian Hardy; and her father (I should be very sorry to hear he had ever earned the title of 'blackguard') went out to South America about five-and-twenty years ago, as I've heard. Lilian wasn't born at the time. Indeed, her elder sister—Elizabeth or Liz, as they call her—was only a baby."

"Lilian Hardy *your* wife's name! That's odd; but, my dear Max, I wasn't speaking of her father, God forbid! Still it is an odd coincidence—Lilian and Elizabeth! Why, Elizabeth was Lady Mortlake's name, *her* mother, and a beautiful woman too, though not so beautiful as Lilian. She

was a lily if you like, poor girl! tall, graceful, golden-haired, with the fairest skin and sweetest blue eyes that——"

"You are describing my wife to a T, Sir Peter," said Max feverishly. "If you are not tired, do you mind turning into the Park here, and telling me the story of the girl you speak of? If—if it should turn out to have to do with Lilian's parents,"—he gave a great gulp as he spoke—"I may have to ask you, for the sake of your old friendship for me and mine, not to tell it to any one else; but you may speak quite frankly to me. I know nothing of my wife's father—never saw or spoke to him—and have only heard of him as an Englishman of very fair position, the manager or director of some water-works there, a widower with a comfortable house and three daughters. I made this one's acquaintance when she was staying with some friends during her father's absence in Europe, and our marriage took place in a hurry, owing to the way in which the cholera was raging there at the time; and from the house of the English Consul, who had been entrusted by Mr. Hardy with the guardianship of his daughters. That will give you a hint as to his own standing there; but, as I say, I have never seen him, and from what the girls tell me he must be an extremely reserved man, for they know as little of their other relations or family connections as I do. Lilian is not even acquainted with her

mother's maiden name. You spoke of Lady Mortlake, however, but surely Lord Mortlake's wife is not old enough to be the grand——"

"It was not *this* Lord Mortlake, but the last one, his second cousin. Why, my dear boy, it was that terrible affair, and losing his only son just at the same time, that killed the old man, and sent the title into the younger branch. But really, this is all very strange and mysterious. From what you say it does seem, I own, as if your Lilian might turn out to be that poor, unfortunate girl's child, and yet—don't you think in any case we had better let the subject drop? It's an old story now, belonging to bygone days, and you may be sure *I* won't rake it up again."

"Not if I ask you to do so for me, Sir Peter? I should really like to know something about this daughter of Lord Mortlake's. Do you say she married a man of the name of Hardy?"

"Oh, yes, yes, there's no doubt they *were* married, though Hardy wasn't his name then, but Jones. He was the son of a crossing-sweeper, a waif picked out of the gutter whom Lord Mortlake had taken a fancy to in former days, had had him educated, and finally made a kind of confidential clerk of him. In return for all this Jones ran away with the Hon. Miss Stanton, his patron's daughter, and (as it was

said) under peculiarly disgraceful circumstances, persuaded her he was taking her to the sick-bed of her brother, with whom Lord Mortlake was not on good terms at the time; and then, when he had got her safely in France, frightened her into a marriage on the assurance that her character was already ruined. You can guess a little of the scandal that ensued: and to this day no one can understand how a little weasely nobody—more like a white rat than a man—like Jones, could have obtained sufficient influence over beautiful Lilian Stanton to force her into such an act of madness; but there! since her mother's death she had been left a good deal to herself, and though a sweet and loving creature, she was always weak—weak and impulsive to a degree. Bernard Stanton came back from Italy, where he was staying, and finding the couple had returned to London, horsewhipped Jones publicly there in Pall Mall; and the upshot of it all was that Lord Mortlake agreed to pay the blackguard a sum down on condition of his changing his name and residing out of England for the rest of his natural life. He would never see his daughter again, nor would any of her family; and what became of him no one ever heard. It was only through being an old friend of her father's that I was told that Jones had taken the name of Hardy, and gone to live with his wife in Spain. Some one said too that he speculated

largely, and lost nearly all the money he got with her; but even if that was true, he was just the sort of fellow to pick up again; shrewd and clever as a needle, and with an air of intense respectability that would have taken in any one. Indeed, during the short time that Mortlake was Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, he used to swear by him as the best clerk he had ever known. My dear Max, this isn't a pleasant story, and upon my word I don't know why you made me tell it. We've no evidence, you know, that your wife's father is in any way connected with it."

"Pardon me, I think the evidence is disagreeably strong; and probably when you see Lilian you will say so yourself," said Max gloomily. He was taking it to heart, indeed, more than Sir Peter expected.

Some men might not have cared very much about the past indiscretions of their fathers-in-law; more especially if the latter were safely settled in a distant country, and not likely to come across their path; but with Max it was different. If there was one thing on which he prided himself, it was on the unsullied respectability and good standing of his own family and connections; and now, when he was just coming into his property; when he had "married a wife" and was about to settle down in his father's place as a young squire of fair means and fair repute, a probable J. P. or even M. P.

of the future, it did seem hard that he should not be able to feel an equal complacency in his wife's family and belongings; could not answer any questions that might be asked him concerning them; but must rather stifle all mention of that hateful father of hers; and instead of being in a position to boast of his Lilian as a granddaughter of the late Lord Mortlake—a thing which would have been most dear to his title-loving heart, and might have brought him into friendly connection with the present holder of the peerage—must even dread lest her remarkable beauty or resemblance to her maternal grandmother should lead to a raking up of the repulsive *mésalliance* with a crossing-sweeper's son.

And who was to tell, after all, whether Sir Peter's version of the story was not kinder than the actual truth; whether the marriage (if there was one at all) was legal in all its forms; or whether there were more discreditable circumstances behind! When you are determined to look at the black side of things, you may as well make them as black as possible; and as Max stood still, grinding his heel into the gravel-walk, and looking out over the ornamental water in the Park, even the fresh spring greenness of the turf, the blue March sky against which the still leafless trees showed delicately in their bare, brown tracery, and the beds gay with purple and white crocuses and palely yellow primroses shrinking behind their

crumped leaves from the cool, crisp wind, seemed to have a taint, a shadow on them. If he had but known all this earlier! Truly Providence might have been more cruel to him; might have planted this obnoxious father and sisters-in-law (for the moment poor Liz and Loo looked at their worst to him) at his very door, where it would be impossible to ignore them without active disagreeableness and keen pain to Lil; whereas now they were at least removed from him as far as it was well possible for them to be; and all he had to do was to restrict as much as possible her communications with them in the future, and teach her that, with the new life and family relations into which she had entered, the old had come to an end, and she must learn neither to dwell on nor speak of them more than was necessary.

Nor did he stop to think whether there would be any unkindness to his wife in this—to her who clung with such sensitive, tender faithfulness to every tiniest reminder of those among whom she had grown up, and who had been good to her in days of old. On the contrary, he thought he was behaving with as much affection as wisdom. He was too honest to blame her for this humiliating page from her father's life. He knew that she was as ignorant of it as he had been; and every instinct of gentlemanliness and good feeling impelled him to keep her so, even at the cost of a little

seeming cruelty with regard to the family whose influence over her could not in any case be regarded as desirable as his own.

Besides, she belonged to him now, not them, and it was his duty to take care of her, and educate her to the duties of her new position; a position which he was particularly anxious should be entered upon with what sailors call a "clean bill", untarnished by previous gossip or depreciatory criticism and comment. They were to go down to their Berkshire home, when the time came, as a young king and queen entering on their kingdom, with the unanimous approval of their neighbours, and received with a welcome whereon no censuring tongue should jar. And that this might be so, he was not even sorry that the fact of the Court being let to very paying tenants till midsummer, and the necessity of abstaining from any unnecessary outlay or expenses for the present, had decided him on moving into furnished apartments in London for a time, and so of allowing Lil sufficient leisure and opportunity to become indoctrinated into English ways and habits before she was exposed to that fiercest "light that beats upon a throne", the criticisms of county neighbours.

He had not at all got over his first ideas of her (Max Lorimer was one of those people who seldom do part with their first ideas) as a lovely, white-skinned, English-speak-

ing Pocohontas, exquisite in form and colouring as a wild-flower; but equally untrained and uncultivated, equally wanting the prunings, clippings, hedgings round, and stiffened soil, proper for a prim, decorous garden-flower, intended to grow with others in the tame uniformity of a "bedded-out" British border. The beauty of the wild-flower had won him against his better judgment; but even in doing so he had still meant, should it become his, to apply the prunings and clippings necessary to its improvement; seeing that he was not at all a man who despised the artificial charms of "ribbon bordering"; or preferred, on its own intrinsic merits, a wildling of the woods to a "florist's flower". "There are florists' flowers, *and* florists' flowers," he would have said; "and because now and then a stiff or ugly one is turned out, that is no reason to cry down the whole race, or to exalt a weed growing by the wayside over the magnificence of form and colouring in a well-set and well-grown pelargonium; the weed might have its attractions —*by the wayside;* but no reasonable being could hesitate in deciding on the pelargonium as the fittest adornment for a gentleman's button-hole;" and it was as a particularly rare blossom for his coat, one which other men should covet and admire, that Max regarded this fair foreign flower he had gathered.

Just at first, indeed, in the honeymoon of their wedded life, the very perfection of her grace and beauty, the tender frankness of her love for himself, and his own love for her, had blotted out, for the time, his critical faculties; and in telling her again and again how perfect she was, he forgot that he himself had found imperfections in her before. Besides, in a country where all was strange, *bizarre*, and un-English, she had been rather less so than others. He had not had the opportunity for those "odious comparisons" afforded him by seeing her as now among the formally polished and artificially flattened down women of orthodox London society; and, therefore, the revelation that she was not like them in a thousand ways and habits, of thoughts and manners, struck him with new force; and even without the impulse afforded him by this discovery respecting her parentage, determined him on commencing the pruning and clipping with as little delay as possible.

After all, why not? He himself had had his "wild-oats" days; but they were over now; and, like many another man and woman of like calibre, and under like circumstances, he was all the more inclined to *ranger* himself and parade his present sobriety because of them. It might be all very well for mad Prince Hal to consort with gibing Poins and roisterous Falstaff, and flout the sour-faced dignity of Judge

Gascoigne; but Harry V. of England had the majesty of crown and country to keep up, and "knew none o' these former things"; and to Max Lorimer, big with the new dignities of marriage, property, and Squireship, the levities of a few months back seemed removed from him as by a lapse of years; and he was not only more inclined to pare away the slightest excrescences in others by the light of his own bygone irregularities, but could even afford to turn a refreshingly benevolent eye on the memory of his lately detested step-father, and regret that he had not always taken in good part that grim-visaged Colonel's sage, if unpalatable, advice.

After his conversation with Sir Peter, he did not altogether wish that his deference to his guardian's wishes had prevented him from ever visiting South America; but he did feel that it behoved him to be more than ever careful that he brought back nothing discreditable from there.

CHAPTER V.

LIL'S FIRST AND LAST RIDE.

"On ne donne rien si libèralement que les conseils."
La Rochefoucauld.

"Les esprits mèdiocres condamnent d'ordinaires tout ce qui passe leurs portèes."—*Idem.*

"MAX! MAX! such good news! The ever-useful one—you know who I mean—Erlscourt, of course, has been here, and, what do you think? he's going to lend me a horse, one of his own, to ride in the Park whenever I like. He says it will carry a lady beautifully. Isn't it delightful? And I, who haven't had a gallop for so long!"

It was one day in April, and Lil had come flying downstairs to meet her husband as he came in from a walk at lunch time, her glad voice going out before her with that happy regardlessness of listening servants and landladies which was natural enough in one who had never before had to deal with domestics who understood English, or required their employers to keep a perpetual check on conversation in their presence.

Max had once or twice hinted at the necessity to her, but Lil forgot again, perhaps because the habits of twenty years are not to be uprooted in as many days; or perhaps (as her husband thought) because his suggestion had not been put forward with sufficient strength.

A certain amount of quiet and privacy is necessary for the proper imparting of instruction, so that it shall sink in and take root; and of this there had not as yet been much in the Lorimers' London life. The lawyers had kept Max pretty constantly employed with business connected with his own and his step-sister's property, and with the present management of the land. There were a good many friends of his—chiefly of the male sex—in town; and these, with one or two distant relations, had called on Lil, and being cordially urged by her to "come in of an evening" in Monte San Felipian fashion, had been persuaded to try the experiment, and find it so pleasant as to require frequent repetition; and, above all, there was sight-seeing, as to which Lil was insatiable; and in the gratification of which passion, as in the evening visits and morning calls, Lord Erlscourt, who had long since laid his allegiance at Lil's feet, not only invariably assisted, but was even allowed at times to act as Max's deputy.

"Please regard me as Lorimer's young brother and fag, and drive me about as such," the young nobleman had said.

"I've nothing in the world to do before my people come up to the family Ark in Belgrave Square; and as for my horses, they're just eating their heads off; so it's a real charity to take them out, and make use of an idle and forlorn child, who is sure to get into mischief if you don't. Where do you want to go to-morrow? I can come for orders at any time;" and Lil, to whom kindness and hospitality to strangers were among the most natural properties of humanity, took him at his word in the frankest manner, and signified her wishes or commands with a briskness and decision which delighted his young lordship quite as much as did the power it gave him of complaining of her tyranny and exactions.

"I do believe she learns by heart all the dirtiest holes and corners of London, that she may say she wants to go and see them," he grumbled to Max, with a face of such dismayed lugubriousness as admirably veiled his actual delight in playing cavalier to so adorably fresh and pretty a girl. "I didn't mind going down on my knees and shedding briny tears over Charles Dickens' grave in Westminster Abbey, though cold paving-stones in March, don't you know, aren't the best thing for a man's joints; but *she* did it, and I couldn't let her be singular. I was delighted even to drive her out to see Thackeray's house in Kensington, and the slab to 'Kitty Clive' on Twickenham church; though, 'pon my soul, Max,

your wife's awfully gone on tombs! It's as good as a course of 'Harvey's Meditations' to go about with her; but to run the risk of being poisoned by the odours of Billingsgate, because she *must* see the fish-market there, or to tag along at the heels of a beastly beef-eater, and a crowd of out-of-elbow 'Arrys and 'Arriets, because it's been the dream of her life to go over the Tower with a volume of Harrison Ainsworth under her arm, is—— Well, you and I are friends, old man, and I've always had it on my conscience, don't you know, that it was I who got you into a hole at Monaco that time—I'll go on at it as long as there's life in me; but I warn you my constitution isn't very strong, and I won't back it to sustain a strain like this for any length of time. Only yesterday, she insisted on stopping the phaeton outside *Newgate*, and gazing up at that delightful gaol till I'm sure the congregated criminals outside must have thought we had some dear relation among those immured within; and to-day she's been awfully savage with me because, when you told me to bring her to meet you at the Temple, I wouldn't take her through Seven Dials *en passant!* She said she had heard so much of the poor people there that she wanted to *see* them; but there I did stand out. I could have resigned myself to losing our watches and money, and dying of typhus or small-pox; but a fellow must think of his morals, don't you know,

and mine won't stand the flow of language in those choice localities. Consider my lady mother's feelings if she heard me indulging in Seven Dialisms when she came up! She might stop my liberty."

"Is the Countess so very terrible, Lord Erlscourt?" said Lil gaily. She looked on the young nobleman as an amusing little boy, and was not in the least flattered by his self-sacrificing devotion. "Don't mind him, Max, he *likes* it really; and if he's rude enough to pretend he doesn't, we won't let him go about with us any more, will we, *querido?* You shall be sole cicerone, and get all the—what is it you call them?—the tips!"

"*Gratuities*, ladies call them, Lil," said Max gravely, on which Lord Erlscourt exclaimed:

"Do they really? Are you sure, Lorimer? If so I'll write off and tell my sisters. *They* always say 'tips'; but then they're shockingly unladylike," a speech which of course quite did away with the effect of Max's little hint. It really was impossible to do anything at the "pruning and clipping" process when Erlscourt was present. He was one of those born buffoons who always make game of everything you say.

On this occasion, however, he was not present, and therefore as soon as they were in the dining-room with the door

shut, Max steeled himself to turn a displeased frown on the lovely radiant face, which was still waiting for his sympathy and said:

"My dear Lil, I do *wish* you would not call out about our private affairs on the staircase, or speak of men by their surnames without any prefix. Nothing can be in worse form. Really, to hear you talking of 'Erlscourt', one would think he was a man-servant, or one of our tradespeople."

Lil drew back a little, the sensitive colour flashing into her cheek; though scarcely so much from the sense that she had done something unseemly, as that Max had come in "cross again". She had no idea, you see, of the educational projects simmering in her husband's mind, or of the additional need for them which he considered to have arisen from Sir Peter's story. That Max had fallen in love with her, and married her, for what she was in herself, was a fact of which she was so innocently confident, and which had been so often impressed upon her by his tender flatteries during those last weeks at Casa Blanca, and in their honeymoon, that the mere idea that he could wish her to be anything different was one which would never have occurred to her without the very plainest suggestion; and knowing of old that his moods were slightly capricious, and his temper not always to be depended on, she set down any little sharpness of

comment, or unflattering criticism, to the poor fellow being tired or put out, and forgave it with ready sweetness and good-humour. Now, however, she answered on the impulse of the moment:

"Why, Max, what do you mean? I only speak of him as you do, and *you* always call him Erlscourt. I thought it very natural, as he is such an old friend."

"Natural in me; but not in you. Women are not generally supposed to copy men in their language."

"Not in their bad language, certainly, but surely there is nothing bad in speaking of a familiar friend by his familiar name between ourselves, instead of saying 'Lord this' or 'Señor Don that' at every word. We never dreamt of such formality at home."

"I know you didn't; and though I don't like to say so, Lil, I must tell you that it sounded very *outrè* and unladylike to me then; and would have done so to anybody who knew anything of the usages of good society."

Lil coloured more deeply still. To hear that Max thought anything in *her* "unladylike", was intensely mortifying, especially after the deference which she had been in the habit of seeing accorded to her refinement and grace. She must have been in an unusually naughty mood at the moment; for a spurt of the old sarcastic impulse from which Max had

suffered now and then at Casa Blanca came over her, and she said, rather provokingly:

"Is it one of the 'usages of good society' here to make no difference between the way in which people talk in their own families, or in the world outside? *Por cierto*, if it is so, I don't wonder the climate is so cold; it must be the natives themselves that freeze it."

Max looked seriously annoyed. He had made what he felt to be a perfectly just correction, and he did not deserve to have it met in this way. He turned away from her and took a chair at a distance, saying:

"Of course, if you choose to answer me in that way, it is no good my making any kind of suggestion to you, Lil. I did so out of kindness, and because I don't choose that my wife should get spoken of as fast or free in her manners; but if you take it in that way I am silenced."

But Lil had hardly spoken before she repented herself; and she was now in more hurry to do penance for her offence than he to exact it.

"Max, *querido*, forgive me," she said, crossing the room to him and nestling her soft cheek against his own; "I was quite wrong to speak so, and of course you must know best about the *modas del pais* here; but do you really mean that it sounds fast to you if I talk of our men friends by their

surnames when we are alone together? because all Spanish ladies do so, and you know how strict they are as to *etiqueta.*"

Max smiled, a little softened.

"*I* should not think you fast, dear, because I know you have not been brought up as—well, quite as English girls generally are; but, frankly, other people would: your servants, for instance, and my sister."

Lil turned very white. It was as if the name had suddenly chilled her.

"Your—sister," she said in quite a different tone, "but—Max, she is not coming *here!*"

He laughed outright.

"Coming here? No; don't you know that she is old-fashioned enough to prefer the country to London, and to think married people prefer being by themselves? Apparently, from my wife's tone, she is right there. Why, Lil, what is the matter? You are shivering."

"I am cold," she said, going to the fire and crouching down by it with her face turned to the blaze; then with a hurried change of tone: "But, Max, of course I will not speak so again if it sounds bad. You see I haven't got used to servants understanding anything we say to one another as yet. And now, won't you be kind, and congratulate me on my news? I think Erl—Lord Erlscourt has been so good.

It seems that ever since I mentioned last week how much I missed my riding, he has been having a horse of his exercised with a side-saddle and skirt, and he says it is quite ready for me now; and that, if you will let him, he will bring it round to-morrow about twelve o'clock. Won't it be jolly, Max?"

Max looked doubtful. He was not (for a wonder) the least jealous of Lord Erlscourt; the frank way in which Lil ridiculed while making use of the young nobleman, and the latter's palpable inferiority to himself in personal and mental attractions, seeming to make such a feeling absurd; nor did he mind making use of his friend himself to take Lil about in those sight-seeing excursions in the morning, which he detested himself, and was not unselfish enough to condescend to without actual necessity; but he was aware that the son of the Earl of Broadacres was not an unimportant person to other people, and that in the Park his appearance at any lady's side was not likely to pass unnoticed. He said hesitatingly:

"Very jolly; but I don't quite know, Lil, about your riding alone with Erlscourt. People might talk."

"My dear Max, of course they might: but won't you go too? I never thought of anything else."

"Well, you see, I haven't got a horse yet. In fact, I'm

looking out for one now, for a man must have something to ride, and I hate hired beasts."

"Just for once, darling, and as it's arranged."

"Well, as it's arranged, I suppose I must. But did you say twelve o'clock, Lil? I have an appointment then."

"Oh, Max, and Lord Erlscourt can't alter the hour, because he has gone out of town to-day for the night, and he begged me to be ready to start when he came, as 'Brown Katie'—the mare—is apt to get ill-tempered if she's kept standing."

"Yes; and then there will be an accident! Well, Lil, you and Erlscourt had better start without me. That won't matter if I catch you up almost immediately, and I'll order the horse to meet me at Brown's office. I sha'n't let him keep me five minutes."

So it was arranged, and Lil looked happy and exultant; but in the event Mr. Brown did keep Max more than double five minutes; and by the time he got to the Park, he became aware not only that it was very full of people walking and riding, but that the eyes of nearly every one there were turned in one direction with an amount of animation and curiosity which could scarcely, as he thought, betoken the approach of anything less interesting than home or foreign royalties.

It was now in the second week of April. Parliament was sitting: and though of course the season had not yet com-

menced, there were sufficient fashionable people in town to give the ride a tolerably lively aspect on a bright sunshiny morning like the one in question, when

> "All the green leaves over me
> Clapped their little hands in glee,"

when "red-lipped daisy flowers" dotted the emerald grass, and every bed and border was crammed with hyacinths filling the air with sweetness, deep-hued tulips, and gay polyanthuses; and even the moist brown earth thrown up by the horses' feet exhaled a pleasant fragrance.

Curious to see who was coming, Max reined in his horse for a moment on one side before proceeding on the quest for his wife and friend; but almost in the same moment he heard an exclamation from some people near him.

"Here she comes again! What a devilish pretty girl! Who is she? The new circus-rider that Sanger is advertising? By Jove, though, it *is* Erlscourt with her!" and round the corner came sweeping almost at full gallop a brown mare, her glossy neck and fore-quarters flecked with foam, her hind hoofs scattering soil on either side; and seated well back in the saddle, swaying as gracefully as if waltzing to each movement of her steed, and with the reins held almost ostentatiously on one finger—*Lil!*—her white teeth gleaming with happy laughter; her cheeks flushed with the loveliest

rose-colour; her golden, glittering mass of curls and braids rippling out upon the wind, and crowned by a gay little *toque* of emerald-coloured velvet, the loose crown of which drooped coquettishly on one side, and rested on her loosened shining hair; a bunch of fiery-hued azaleas glowing like flame on her bosom, and a dark-green habit, so much longer, fuller, and thinner in texture than those worn by the sex in this country, as to flutter far and freely behind her in her rapid progress: an apparition altogether novel and unwonted enough to strike wonder into the bosom of every orthodox and well-bred idler in the Park. Close beside her, but keeping by an immense effort to the regulation canter, came Lord Erlscourt, immaculately correct in every *iota* of his get-up, his little blonde head and pale, small-featured face set in a mask of bland, expressionless propriety, and behind them—at a considerable distance—rode the groom, staring, as who should say, "*he* had never seen his master out with the like o' that 'un before."

With a word unmeant for ears polite, ground out between his teeth, Max turned his horse and rode off sharply, not in pursuit, but by a path which intersected the one his wife and her cavalier were pursuing; and met her again close to the Powder Magazine. Lil had not recognised him the first time; but at the first sight of his face in the distance her own became radiant with double happiness. The delight

of feeling herself once more in the saddle, with the reins in her hand, and a good horse under her, had brought back all her old sense of irresponsible girlish freedom ; and the instant she recognised Max, she wheeled her horse round with a sharpness which would have unseated any less perfect rider, and which made it curvet fiercely, and dashed off to meet him ; exclaiming as she drew near :

"Oh, Max, I am so glad you are come. It is so delightful. She goes beautifully. I don't know when I've enjoyed—— Why ! what is the matter ? "

Max did not even look at her : he *dared* not. The anger raging in him was such as to include every one present in it, and lifting his hat ceremoniously to Lord Erlscourt, he brought his own horse close beside his wife's, and hissed rather than whispered in her ear :

"If you have had enough of this vulgar exhibition, I will trouble you to come home with me at once."

Lil stared at him in utter bewilderment.

"What exhibition ? I don't understand, dear ? " she said. "Didn't you come to join our ride ? I was finding it so pleasant."

"So it seems ! " he retorted savagely ; "but as I don't find it pleasant to see you pose as a female mountebank for the benefit of London Society, I must insist on your leaving the

place at once;" and turning to Erlscourt, he made him a formal apology for carrying off Mrs. Lorimer, on the ground that some urgent matter required her at home.

The young nobleman shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. Of course he understood all about it. Indeed, his own ideas of the fitness of things had received a severe strain at the first sight of his friend's wife in such an abnormally gorgeous riding costume; and on the impulse of the moment he had even proposed to her to change their proposed route, and go for a ride into the country, Hampstead way or somewhere; but Lil had scouted the suggestion, reminding him that Max was to meet them in the Park, and that it was her great ambition to enjoy a canter there; and his lordship had thereupon resigned himself to the required ordeal with a chivalrous good-breeding, which gave him a feeling of some contempt for Max when he saw the latter's inability to copy it. The good-natured young man pitied Lil from his heart as she bade him good-bye; her eyes moist with apologetic bewilderment, and a look of absolute fright on the face, a moment back so radiant with happiness.

But when they got home, Max found her less meek than he expected under the torrent of indignation which he poured out upon her. At first, indeed, she was too much astonished to speak; but as he went on, and she was able to grasp the

seemingly paltry cause for his harsh and extraordinary conduct, a flush of something like real anger came into her face, and she exclaimed with almost equal warmth:

"Do you mean, then, that it was *only* because I did not wear a tall hat like a man, and one of those hideously short habits, scarcely covering the feet, and which I do not even think decent, that the women here wear—for *nothing but that* you have acted to me in this way: taken away the pleasure I had been looking forward to so eagerly, been rude to Lord Erlscourt, and—and mortified me in a public place! Max, I could never have believed it of you. I thought something serious was the matter: that I had done something *wrong!*"

Max nearly gasped. To have the tables turned on him in this way, to be told that it was *he* who had sinned in good taste and good feeling, when he was boiling over with righteous wrath, and steeling himself for a scene of penitence and humiliation, took away his breath.

"And do you see nothing wrong in mortifying *me?*" he said hotly, "by making a public exhibition of yourself in a cockatoo attire, which would never be seen in a civilised country out of the ring and sawdust! Do you know that I heard you spoken of as the new circus-girl at Sangers', and that, before the day is out, Erlscourt's appearance with you will be the subject for chaff in fifty men's mouths! They

will ask him for introductions to you, and he will have to explain that you are my wife—*Max Lorimer's wife!* God! I never was more ashamed in my life. And I, who had such particular reason for wishing you to make a good start, and be well received. Ah! well, there's no chance of it now."

Lil had grown very pale. She had never seen Max so angry in her life; and yet it was simply impossible for her to understand even now the occasion for it.

"But, Max," she said, trying to speak gently, and not show how much she was hurt, "if the people who know you and Lord Erlscourt hear that I am your wife, that settles the question. They will also know that I am a South American, and that South American women are not likely to wear the same fashions as English ones, who—as all the world agrees—are the worst dressed anywhere; and for others, who do not know you, *que importa* what they think or say?"

"You care nothing, then, for what is thought of you in the world you are going to live in? You *like* to be different from every one else; to make yourself talked about?" said Max, still in the same heat. Her calmness exasperated him.

"No," said Lil hesitatingly; "I do not like it. I cannot help caring; but I can feel that is a weakness: that if I were stronger—a *man* like you, for instance—I should be more sensible. What harm is there in being different from

other people so long as the difference is for the better? Some of those women had habits so short you could see they wore cloth trousers, as men do. I saw them myself, and I felt my face blushing lest Lord Erlscourt should do so too. I would rather never ride at all than wear anything so unwomanly; and, as for my little cap"—the tears rising suddenly to her eyes—"dear old John Logan said, when I first made it, that he never liked me so well in anything before; and you . . you yourself . . you told me I looked as . . . as pretty as a green-crested humming-bird in it. Ah! you have forgotten; but I put it on to-day for that only—to remind you of old days."

She had turned away with quivering lip; and Max touched in spite of his anger, put his arm round her.

"Poor Lil!" he said, in a much kinder tone. "But—can't you understand, dear, that was in the backwoods, and those days were different from these?"

"But *I* am not different, Max, and if you liked me for what I was then, why should you want me to change now?"

"Why? Because—because circumstances change, and people with them. You were a little wild girl then, Lil," smiling at her affably; "but you are an English gentleman's wife now, and I want you to be like other English ladies, and not to make yourself talked about and me laughed at among the

people I care for. Come, I'm sure that is not unreasonable, so kiss me, and go and take off those horrid things. You must not ride again till you have a proper habit and hat."

But though Lil obeyed him, and gave the required kiss, she went away feeling as if no future ride could ever be as pleasant to her as that spoilt one might have been. The remembrance of Max's furious face, and the slight put upon her before Lord Erlscourt was still too keen within her. She felt as if she should never like to face the young nobleman again; and then (though she had been too generous to remind her husband of it) there had arisen in her mind while he was speaking, a vivid picture of that scene in front of the estancia on shearing day, when Max had made his appearance in that gorgeous costume which had provoked so much amusement in the other men. She recollected their good-tempered laughter, and his fierce indignation; and how pity and kindness for him as a stranger among them had moved her to put aside girlish shyness, and risk misrepresentation, by coming forward as his friend, and standing beside him so that he might not feel himself ridiculous.

Had *he* forgotten it now that he was in his own land, and she was the stranger? But to-day it was Lord Erlscourt who had showed himself the kinder and most gentlemanly under similar circumstances; and as Lil took off the "cocka-

too" cap, a shower of salt tears fell on it. She could not yet think that she had done anything to be ashamed of herself; but it cut her to the heart that her husband should have shown his inferiority to another man by making public the fact that he was ashamed of *her*.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE RIFT IN THE LUTE."

"Plus on juge moins on aime."—*Balzac.*

"Being observed where observation is not sympathy, is just being tortured."—*E. B. Browning.*

"Inconsistencies cannot both be right; but imputed to man they may both be true."—'*Rasselas.*'

IT must be evident, by this time, that the "clipping and pruning" process was not an easy one in Max's case; and as time went on it became even more disheartening to him; the very unexpectedness and variety of Lil's deviations from orthodox English ways rendering it impossible for the most jealously watchful man to guard against, or deter her from them.

What could be more humiliating, for instance, when you had induced a very swell lady friend to call on your wife, than to have a distinct view of her, as you and the former drove up to the house, standing on a table, her lovely arms bared to the elbow, and polishing the gaselier with a big

duster and all the energy of three housemaids rolled into one! Yet when spoken to with due horror on the subject, Lil at first laughed almost as much as she blushed, and declared that the visitor would only think her a good housewife, and that a gentleman in Monte San Felipe had once found Liz sweeping the *patio* when they were without a servant, and had not only taken away the broom and finished the work for her, but had proposed to her afterwards. The lodging-house servants kept everything so dirty that she could 'not bear to see it; and Max himself had complained twice of the dust on those gaseliers. She thought he would have praised her when he saw how nice and bright they were.

Max explained with great care that it was not her doing the work he minded, but being *seen* doing it; that manual occupations of that sort were considered derogatory to a lady, &c., &c.; and Lil was very docile this time, and promised not to let herself be so caught again. He was not in the least prepared, however, for the way she would keep her word; and was somewhat taken aback by the aspect of the house, with the somewhat scanty lace curtains of the drawing-room windows dragged together and pinned across, when he and a barrister friend, once the fastest of his own fast set at Oxford, approached the house together one day at lunch-time.

"You've got gay neighbours, I see, Lorimer," said the

barrister, glancing at the shrouded windows. "I hope you don't find them troublesome;" and of course Max was obliged to own that the rooms indicated were his own: adding quickly, that in tropical countries, where his wife came from, the sitting-rooms were always kept darkened so as to shut out the heat and sun.

As, however, there was neither heat nor sunshine on the day in question, the explanation seemed to lack force even in his own ears, and to be still further weakened by the picture presented to them on entering the room, of Lil and Lord Erlscourt seated on the sofa side by side, looking very lively, and as close to the fire as possible. Max, with the irritability of hyper-sensitiveness, was so annoyed that he hardly waited to introduce the new guest, but strode across the room and pulled the curtains open with the exclamation uttered in no pleasant tone:

"How dark you always keep these rooms, Lil! I know you South Americans love to shut out the sunshine; but I should think you could bear what there is to-day."

"*I* should think so too, dear," said Lil, with a gay little shiver. "Why, there isn't any to shut out. We pinned the curtains together for a *very* different reason, didn't we, Lord Erlscourt?" glancing at the young nobleman with an arch smile, to which he responded with an amused one.

After that, lunch was gone through with great serenity on the part of every one but the host, who was decidedly out of temper, the barrister making himself particularly pleasant to Erlscourt, and being almost demonstratively polite to his fair hostess. Both guests left rather early, however, and as soon as they were out of the house Max asked, in the "thunderous" tone to which Lil was getting accustomed:

"And now, Lil, I will trouble you to tell me what you meant by your mystery with Erlscourt. Abominable bad taste *I* call that sort of thing!"

Lil had sat down to the piano, and was trying over a plaintive little air with one hand. She turned round wonderingly.

"What piece of mystery, Max, dear? I don't——"

"Understand? Oh, yes, you do," he interrupted, less courteously than usual. "I mean your reason for pinning up the window-curtains in that disreputable way. If Erlscourt is in the secret, I think I have a right to be."

"Why, of course!" said Lil quietly, though his tone brought a streak of painful colour to her cheek. "I should have told you then, but for Mr. Griffiths being here, and remembering what you said about household work being derogatory. You know the new parlour-maid here isn't very clever, and, as I knew you wanted things to look nice for

Mr. Griffiths, it just occurred to me, after Lord Erlscourt came, to open the folding-doors and see how she had set the luncheon-table. Oh! Max, it was so funny. He couldn't help laughing, nor could I. The glasses were all upside-down, and the napkins not folded; and the flowers, which I had arranged beforehand, hidden away on a side-table. I said I *must* put it to rights, and he offered to help; and then I just recollected in time what you said about being seen from the street, so I pulled the curtains to, and pinned them to make them meet, and we had *just* got through and gone back to the fire before you came in. We did make the table look nice too—didn't we, Max? Lord Erlscourt was quite clever at folding the napkins, and the only thing I forgot was to unpin the curtains again. But what *did* you mean by saying they looked disreputable so?"

Max had grace enough not to tell her. It was impossible to doubt Lil's innocence, which, indeed, was rather too palpable, though the task of enlightening it was by no means pleasant; being received, not with pretty shamed blushes for her own ignorance, but with a somewhat aggravating blankness of comprehension, as though you had been reading her an Anacreontic ode in the original Greek, followed, however, by a flash of scornful disgust, which some-

how had almost the effect of including the expounder of such explanations with those whose ways of life made them necessary.

On the present occasion Max felt that he was showing both delicacy and magnanimity by only saying in a tone of bitter sarcasm:

"You had better ask that of some of our friends' wives, *when* they grow friendly enough to give you an opportunity! I can tell you one thing. Griffiths won't let his do so;" and walking out of the room before she could answer.

Poor Max! Certainly if Captain Smith found the moulding of *his* Pocohontas into all the ins and outs of our vitiated, artificial civilisation, as hard a task as young Lorimer did, he must have wished at times that the devoted maiden had left him to the speedy end afforded by the knives and tomahawks of her redskinned compatriots.

But Lil? It is all very well to extend one's pity to her husband; and, indeed, I have tried to be extremely fair in pointing out the extent of his trials and difficulties, having in view the modification of your judgment with regard to future events; but what of Lil's feelings in all this time? the feelings of a girl newly married, taken away from her family, her friends, and all the habits and associations of her whole former life, and brought to a new country and a new people,

only sufficiently similar in external appearance to those to whom she had been accustomed, to make the absolute novelty of all their ways of thinking, speaking and acting, appear the more bewildering.

Yet if she and Max could have blundered through the newness together, laughing alike at their blunders and the insular oddities which made them such, and working gradually down into the swing of things, as people located in the strangest places are fain by degrees to do—if Max had still been the fellow-comrade and lover, instead of a severe censor, standing apart from her, as it were, on a pedestal of superior acquaintanceship with all these things, how happy they might have been; and how much innocent mirth and laughter they might have got out of the very mistakes she was so incessantly making!

It was quite a new experience to Lil to find herself continually in fault, more especially in the eyes of those nearest and dearest to her; and now, when these nearest and dearest were limited to one, when there was not even an appeal "from Pilate to Herod", and father, sisters, and familiar friends with their several opinions, sympathies, and predilections, had passed away into a dim background, the experience was an infinitely more saddening one than her self-righteous young Mentor could possibly have imagined. How much

sadder to be obliged to ask,—was the fault really hers, and, if not, how was the misunderstanding ever to end?

All her life Lil had been conscious of some difference, slight and intangible, but still a difference, from those about her, and which they, who recognised it, were wont to call her fancifulness or dreams, though it was, in fact, only the frame of mind natural to a person who has the misfortune to grow up with an ideal, varying from, and higher than, that of the persons immediately belonging to her. How she came by it, whether it was born with her, as poetry is (and what is a poet but one capable of the largest and purest idealism!) or whether she had imbibed it from the teachings of her early lost mother, whose favourite child she had been, and whose beautiful sad face carried with it an ever-present memory of hopeless yearning, which, even as an infant, Lil had felt without comprehending, it is hard to say; but so it was. Without any definite religious training, without any precise knowledge of *what* she aimed at, Lil was always desiring (as on that first day when we saw her in the old red-tiled, sun scorched balcony of her Uruguayan home) that she and those belonging to her could be something better than they were: could show forth by something more solid and tangible than mere beauty and external refinement, the superiority which they all tacitly asserted over the greater number of their

English-speaking neighbours, and which could never be crushed out, while new-comers, and their naval friends in particular, persisted in recognising it.

But even these merely did so by the outer attributes which she despised. It was only Frank Melville who had seemed to meet her instantly on that higher and ideal altitude where, in her own imagination, she loved to breathe; and perhaps for this, and because her mind-pictures of that altitude had taken form and shape from English poets and authors of the higher stamp, Lil had grown to look to England, and English home life in particular, as the realisation of her ideal; and to keep her eyes ever fixed on some future day in which, either with her father and sisters, or under the protection of a husband, she should enter on an existence in which all the most sacred and delicate fibres of her nature could unfold with perfect freedom; where there would be no straining at effect, no small jealousies, or enforced idleness and frivolity; but a full, dignified life, rich in sympathetic companionship, and noble, practical usefulness.

It was this vision in her mind which kept her happy and hopeful in her banishment at Casa Blanca, and the appreciation of her kindly but rough and incongruous friends there. It was still before her when she first met Max Lorimer; and his apparently instantaneous recognition of her as a kindred

spirit in a circle where *he* undoubtedly shone forth as one cast in a mould and fashion utterly different from those about him, seemed to additionally confirm it, and give it substance and stability in her own eyes.

That in truth he never recognised the *spirit* in her at all; that it was the external casket only he looked at; and that even while yielding himself to the charm and beauty of that, he did so under mental protest, as it were, and with a conscious sense of descent in so succumbing, she never guessed or dreamt. To people of her idealistic temperament, indeed, it seems impossible to disassociate casket and spirit; as impossible as it was for her to believe that a man with a frank, beautiful face and lofty manners; a man who could read noble poetry as only Max, of all the men she knew, read it, could have other than a beautiful frank nature and noble aims and aspirations to correspond. Now, Max, on the other hand, never idealised at all; belonged, indeed, to that class which spares itself all mental analysis of its fellow-creatures, by bringing a preconceived idea, cut and dried from its own pattern, to bear on each of them, and persistently shutting its eyes to all such discrepancies as might interfere with it.

Even that charming pretence of adopted brotherhood had been so completely a pretence with him that he would

scarcely have allowed it to be possible that Lil should look on it in any other light; or should accept it in simple faith as a delightful realisation of one of her pleasantest dreams: an union of two hearts and two minds in mutual helpfulness, and purest sympathy and friendship. According to Max's man-of-the-world view, the *mind* had nothing to say to this matter at all; and so far from any real sympathy with what was passing in Lil's, he hardly troubled himself to consider whether she had one at all; but rather preferred to think of it as a sheet of fair white paper whereon his own opinions and perfections could the more easily be written. Girls as lovely as she was, with blue eyes and laughing lips, and skins like the inner petals of a rose, were not intended to *think;* and if brought up in what he was pleased to consider a barbarous country, and more barbarous ways and habits, would probably think wrong if they attempted to do so of their own volition.

So from the very first these two, who were to make or mar each other's lives, had made acquaintance under a mutual misunderstanding of the other's motives and mental machinery, as wide and complete as though, instead of the common ground on which they seemed to meet and clasp hands, there had yawned between them a gulf deep and wide as Niagara.

Lil had got her first hint of it while they were still at sea;

and when in answer to her eager, tentative questions about the mother country they were going to, the great interests of life there, and the special work and duties which would fall to herself and Max, he had met her with jests and good-humoured chaff, asking her who had been putting all those far-fetched ideas into her little head; and telling her that her special work would be to look pretty, dress well, and love him better than any one in the world. That was all she need think about.

But that was not all, as Lil remembered, that Frank Melville's mother and sister thought about at Craig-darroch. The schools, the charities, the industries by which starving cotters had been raised to comparative prosperity; the intimate, sympathetic acquaintance with every human being outside, and the delightful and intellectual companionship within, which characterised his Highland home, were still fresh in her memory; and it was a great disappointment to her to find that Max had nothing similar to tell her; that he could only describe Troutbury as a "slow little place, only jolly in the hunting and shooting season; neighbours stiff sort of people given to nothing livelier than dinner-parties; and as to the poor—Oh, well, he believed Alice used to look after them when she was at home. There was always poor people everywhere; and she belonged to the soup-kitchen

sort. Women in the country who didn't go in for lawn-tennis were expected to play at that sort of thing." Lil felt, while listening, as if he had thrown a saucer of cold water in her face. Did he know so little of her as to imagine that she *wanted* a life all play and dinner-parties? But this was on board ship, the place of all others where it is least possible to take a serious interest for long in anything; and Lil comforted herself with this thought, and the idea that her husband's apparent shallowness was only due to the constant liability to interruption from one or other of their fellow-passengers.

It was when they arrived in England that the real disillusionment began!

This, the home of dignified freedom and enlightened piety, "White-walled Britain on her rocky throne, viewing with calm, great eyes, the enslavèd nations round!" This grey-skied, fog-bound, sunless place, whose chilly winds and narrow, dingy, colourless streets seemed but a mirror of the people—chilly, narrow, and foggy-minded to match, full as an egg of every sort of prejudice and bigotry; and bound down hand and foot under a million petty, hampering rules and habits, scarcely one of which could bear the test of a strong breath of common sense; but which appeared to those who bent under them as though forged in heaven, and impossible to break through without risk of damnation! Was

this the nation to which she had been so proud to belong? a nation fifty times more vulgar in its wealth, ill-mannered in its finest manners, and ignorant in its ill-natured criticisms of anything like it, than the least of those it trampled on? And if so, how little had she appreciated her own country in fancying that she should find out its inferiority at every step here: here, where fine ladies and titled dames might well take lessons in graceful courtesy, chastity of life and speech, and breadth of hospitable kindliness from the poorest *gaucho's* wife in South America!

She could have blushed over her awakening; for it was the *littleness* of everything which most affected her: the narrowness which walked in one groove, and never looked to right or left; the bigotry, which bandaged its own eyes and then refused to admit the existence of any unseen good; the repellant suggestions of impropriety in a thousand things which had no intrinsic impropriety whatever of their own; the false relations between men and women; the niceties and —the *nastiness* of conventional London life, which irritated and revolted at every turn a girl brought up in a freer, healthier atmosphere, and accustomed, like Gallio, to "care for none of these things".

And this was not the worst. The worst was that Max, her own husband, who had left all this once and gone to other

countries, and seen how differently they managed *their* lives; how frank and brave and sunshiny a thing existence could be made under other conditions—that he should come back to these, and be *satisfied* with them; nay, more, ready and eager to put his head and hands into those mean little shackles, the very hearing of which filled her with contempt, and force her to do the same! Was it possible that he, too, could be small, and narrow, and tyrannical; he, whose noble brow and flashing eyes had seemed to tell so different a tale; that, instead of the mutually helpful and inspiring companionship to which she had looked forward, he could regard her as a mere child, an ignoramus, whose opinions were not only not worth listening to; but who had no right to have any opinions at all; and whose one duty was to do what she was bid, and walk religiously in the narrow routine of meaningless trifles submitted to her? The thought was too painful and humiliating to be bearable to her. Nay, her love and loyalty to Max would not allow her to consent to it; and in the desire to escape from its contemplation, and the utter absence in her present life of any active work or duties, she plunged herself more eagerly than she would otherwise have done into the sights and amusements of this strange place, hoping fervently, that by keeping as much as possible to external things, she might escape reminder of those inward differences which were

gradually lessening her confidence even in her husband's love, and tinging her own with strange and fearful forebodings.

If Max was so harsh and censorious over these petty errors and mistakes, which had no actual harm in them at all, how would his affection stand the test of any *real* fault in her, was a question ever before her eyes now; and in her silence about Melville, more especially after she learnt how closely the young officer had been connected with Max's own sister, she knew that she had been guilty of such a fault; and repented of it all the more bitterly that she could see no way of retrieval that should not be worse in its consequences than the sin itself.

It was a terrible enough fact that it should be so: that the affianced wife of this man who had been slain for a smile from her, should by some cruel stroke of fate, turn out to be her own husband's sister: the grimly pious, illiberal, and religious person, who had never had any sympathy or compassion for her young brother's follies, and whom Lil, in her girlish partisanship, had disliked even by anticipation. To find this woman bound up already with her own life in connection with that horrible tragedy which had all but crushed out the young spring of it, and the last memory of which she had hoped to leave behind her in the lonely grave which she visited on the day before her marriage with Max,

had been a shock so overwhelming and unexpected that it was little to be wondered at that she fainted under it; but if only on recovering she had said: "Max, I have something to tell you about that Mr. Melville. I could not speak about it before when we were acquaintances; but it is right you should know it now," how much better it would have been! It was nothing in the world but nervousness—cowardice, if you will, and if you haven't found out Lil was a coward by this time it isn't much use my saying so—that withheld her. The dread of reopening at all a wound so painful; the impossibility of saying anything without saying *all;* the vivid realisation of how impotent any explanation of her own would sound beside the brutal accusations of Captain Carnegie and the colour lent to the latter by her father's harshness; the still more vivid consciousness of the tendency to jealousy always smouldering in her husband's disposition, all combined to stay her tongue, and keep her silent till (as she told herself) the last moment for speech had gone.

Then she had read Miss Duncan's letter again, and learnt with inexpressible comfort from it that the young lady did not intend to live with them; but had chosen to make her home among the family of the lover she had lost: a fact which she managed to convey none the less clearly because it was so delicately worded; while of Lil she spoke so kindly that it

was quite evident she had never heard of her save from Max's letters, and that Carnegie had, therefore, carried out the programme which he had decided on, and had bound down his conscience-stricken victim to observe.

He might not, indeed, have seen Miss Duncan since Melville's death. Lil knew by consulting a 'Navy List' on board the steamer that he was at present stationed in China; and this being so, might it not be as well after all that she had kept her secret (a harmless one enough) to herself? She was almost sure that Max did not know him. Had it been otherwise, the name must have occurred in conversation before now; but, indeed, his ignorance of his sister's engagement till it was over, showed how little there was in common between her friends and his, and made it seem still more likely that their paths might lie in perfectly different directions in the future. Was there any necessity, then, for raking up a story inexpressibly painful to herself, which had nothing to do with her husband, and might only lead to trouble and misunderstanding between them? She tried to answer herself in the negative; but at the same time her natural candour made the sense of concealment as galling as a hidden wound. She shrank from the very mention of Miss Duncan's name, and made up her mind that, wherever else she went, ropes should not drag her to Scotland, still less to

the neighbourhood of bonny Craig-darroch, whereof Melville had once said to her: "I am sure *you* would like it if you were there."

In old days, it is said that blood has burst from the grave of a murdered man when the murderer stood beside it. To Lil, in her overstrained remorse for the share she had had in this man's death, it seemed as though the very daisies would have turned red beneath her feet had she trespassed on the soil where—oh, cruel fate!—her own husband's sister and the murdered officer's "wee Janie" walked hand in hand in sorrowing sympathy for each other's loss.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

"WE WILL GO HOME."

"'Tis slander,
Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue
Outvenoms all the worms of Nile, whose breath
Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
All corners of the world: Kings, queens, and states,
Maids, matrons, nay, the secret of the grave
This viperous slander enters."—*Cymbeline*, Act III.

"For what care I who calls me well or ill
So you o'ergreen my bad, my good allow?
You are my all the world."—*Sonnets.*

It was still quite early in July, when Max Lorimer made up his mind to leave London, and settle down with his wife in the old home which, since the departure of his tenants at midsummer, was ready and waiting for him.

The season in town had been a good deal more expensive, and not quite so delightful in the way of social success and *kudos* generally, as he had expected. Perhaps, like other young men brought up in a somewhat limited and old-

fashioned country circle, he had somewhat over-estimated his own position; forgetting that, whatever he might be at Troutbury, in London he was really nobody: a man rather poor than rich; and with even his personal attractions rendered negatively uninteresting by the fact of their being already appropriated. What does it matter if a young man be good-looking, a good dancer, or even possessed of the wherewithal to make a wife comfortable, if the wife be provided before the other facts are even known to the general public? It is she who becomes the person of most consequence then; and though there is no doubt that Lil's beauty, grace, and *unusualness* did make her of consequence that season by attracting attention to her wherever she went, and giving other people something to talk about, Max was by no means a man who liked to shine by the reflected light of his wife. That would have been hard enough to bear even if the light in question had been wholly flattering, and not coloured by sufficient contemptuous criticism and animadversion to make it far more unpalatable than the reverse.

The men indeed were almost unanimous in their admiration of Lil, and envy of her husband: "confoundedly lucky dog, to have picked up the loveliest girl out at the very moment when he could afford to secure her"—but with the women it cannot be said that Lil was a success. Perhaps the very

enthusiasm of the other sex predisposed them to find out flaws in her which her half Spanish dress and manners rendered delightfully easy: and that word "picked up" gave them an additional hold. "Who *was* she, after all? Where had young Lorimer found her? Who was to know if she was respectable? Hadn't he been terribly wild himself at college? People said she was carrying on most dreadfully with Lord Erlscourt at present; and that he was quite infatuated with her. The Countess was miserable about it."

"And no wonder," said Mrs. Munchausen, one of the greatest scandal-mongers of society that season, "for they do say that he's never out of the house: and that she receives him and other men of a morning in her dressing-gown *and* diamonds!" A little chorus of subdued shrieks from the five o'clock tea-table interrupted her.

"Oh, impossible! Incredible! But, my dear, if it's true, that—that *stamps* her, you know!"

"Of course, that's what I say. I told my boy (he and young Lorimer were at Eton together, you know) that he might go there if he liked; but that nothing would induce me to do so."

"But—but if she is really—what you think, you know," stammered little Mrs. Coriander, a very young matron of the nervously correct and proper order, "I don't think—surely

she ought not to be invited by correct people—people in society, you know. It would be so very dreadful to get mixed up with anything not quite *nice;* and I did hear she was to be at Lady Meredith's picnic. I really don't think I shall go."

"Oh, I don't think you need take so strong a step as that," put in Laura Fantale, a high-coloured, horse-faced young woman, much given to hunting, and with a deep voice like a man, the sort of girl to make poor sensitive Lil shrink within herself with feminine distaste. "The only thing is to put her down if she tries to get acquainted with you. She is so vulgarly demonstrative, you know, that it isn't safe even to give her an inch; as I am sure *we* found out to our cost."

"What!—you know them then?" said Mrs. Feverfiew, another young matron, rather eagerly. "Do tell me something about them. My husband met Mr. Lorimer on the Continent about a year ago, and liked him so much that when they met at the club the other day he got let in for calling on the wife."

"Oh, Max Lorimer is nice enough in his way: nothing *in* him, you know," said Miss Fantale, who had made a dead set at the young man in question before he was out of his teens, and reaped nothing from it. "We stayed at Troutbury Court in the autumn of the year that my sister Fanny was

married, and just before Mrs. Duncan died; so when I met him last week on the opening day at the Academy, and he shook hands and said, 'Let me introduce my wife to you,' I couldn't *help* being civil; though I must say her costume did horrify me."

"What!—not the dressing-gown, I hope?" said Mrs. Feverfiew satirically.

"Certainly not: a pale green brocaded silk, only fit for a ball, with a train a yard long, spread out all over the floor, *open* at the throat——No, *really*, I am not joking—with a white lace mantilla on her shoulders, a tiny bonnet of the same with a great bunch of blush roses at the throat, and a fan about three-quarters of a yard round, all spangles and green feathers, which she kept opening and shutting and twirling about till every one in the room turned their heads to look at her. I never saw anything like it *off* the stage; or felt more thankful that I had on my plainest ulster and felt hat. I assure you I was quite sorry for Mr. Lorimer, he looked so careworn and embarrassed; and directly he heard I was staying with Fanny at Prince's Gate, asked if he might not come to see us and renew old times."

"But—he didn't bring his wife, *I hope*," said Mrs. Coriander earnestly. Having been brought up from her childhood to consider that only vulgar or depraved people wore em-

broideries on their underclothing, and that, though a feather on your bonnet might (after a certain age) be combined with religion and social standing, *flowers* were at all times an invention of the devil, for the benefit of shop-girls and other low-lived, unmentionable persons, Miss Fantale's description had shocked her almost beyond blushing point.

The young lady shook her head.

"No; but he asked us to call on her; and as Fanny hadn't seen her, and thought that the Court mightn't be a bad place to stay at again, we went. But what *do* you think we found?"

"Lord Erlscourt and Mrs. Lorimer *tête-à-tête*, I presume," said Mrs. Feverfiew bitingly, "and the husband 'not represented,' as the courts say."

Mrs. Coriander blushed, and got up to go. She did not think that, even as a married woman, she ought to stay and listen any longer. It was really like one of those dreadful trials in the papers which one wouldn't read a word of, for the world—only the leaders which tell you all about them!

"No; Oh, fie! Not that I understand what you mean, you know," said Miss Fantale, laughing delightedly. "I almost wish Lord Erlscourt had been there: for they say he is so unaffected and good-natured, and *quite* the best *parti* this season; but he was not. She was all alone, sitting

in the drawing-room with her lap full of stockings—yes, *stockings*, cotton stockings—*darning them!* Fanny thought she was the housemaid, and that we had been shown into the wrong room; but before she could retreat, indeed almost before the servant could get our names out, Mrs. Lorimer jumped up, emptied all her stockings into a basket-table beside her (but not at all as if she were ashamed of them), and declaring she was *so* glad to see us, caught hold of Fanny —mind, she had never seen her in her life before—and *kissed* her: kissed her on both sides of the face!"

There was a general exclamation. "Kissed her! Not really? Your poor sister!"

"Yes; you can guess Fanny's feelings; and she who hates demonstrativeness from any one: hardly ever kisses her own children, you know. She was so furious that she wouldn't say one word all through the visit; and the whole burden of it fell on me; though I had only escaped the same thing by stepping back and giving her the tips of my fingers at arm's-length. We didn't stay ten minutes, and I thought her dreadfully stupid and constrained, and with a very affected accent."

"Did you really? And my husband calls her so deliciously frank and childlike," cried Mrs. Feverfiew; "but now, do tell me, *is* she as pretty as they say?"

"Well, that depends upon taste. You know how *awfully* fond of pretty people *I* am," said Miss Fantale with quite convincing earnestness; "but I really can't see any beauty in her. She is about my age" (the fair Laura had seen her two-and-thirtieth year some months back), "and tall; but quite too dreadfully bad style; that atrocious dyed yellow hair, a complexion too loaded with powder and paint to tell what it is like, no features to speak of, and blue eyes which she spoils by rolling about at every word. Fanny, who had expected her to be dark, was quite taken by surprise. *All* South Americans, you know, are black-haired and brunette-skinned in reality."

Mrs. Munchausen laughed, and leant a little closer to Mrs. Feverfiew. "You don't believe in the South American story, I suppose," she said in an undertone. "I have heard—but mind you mustn't repeat it, for one wouldn't spread scandal for the world—one of Leonard's friends told him, and I believe he heard it from a Mr. Griffiths, an *intimate* friend of young Lorimer's, that the silly fellow fell in love with her and married her from a French *cirque*. Colonel Duncan, his guardian, was in a terrible way about it: forbade him to come back to England, and stopped his allowance; but it was only a little while before he died. In fact, I believe the worry helped to kill the poor old man; and now of course these young people can do as they like."

* * * * * *

It was in this way that people talked about Lil; and though there were some who kept silence, and some who were even kind enough to excuse the poor girl's enormities, in the way of flirting her fans and kissing her own sex, by the reminder that she was half a foreigner, and that the natives of many foreign countries see no guilt in these things, the fact certainly remained that Lil did not become popular among London womankind; and, but for the unvarying kindness of Lord Erlscourt, and the fact that Max was an irreproachable husband so far as fidelity went, she might, after the first novelty, have found time hang somewhat sadly on her hands.

Comfort had come from Uruguay, of course, in the shape of letters; long, closely-scribbled, characteristic epistles from her sisters, which would have been doubly pleasant if Max would have sympathised in her enjoyment of them, instead of appearing rather irritated than pleased at their arrival; kindly notes from the Beauchamps and one or two other friends; a warm-hearted, sesquipedelian-sentenced effusion from dear Miss Carmelita, over which Lil laughed and cried together; and last, though not least, a letter productive of neither laughter nor comfort from her father, and enclosing a brief note to her husband.

Mr. Hardy did not, indeed, waste pen and ink to any great

extent on either of the young people. He told Lil in words which were not harsh or violent, but which certainly had no tenderness in them, that as she had made her choice of a husband, and carried it out without waiting for her father's consent or approval, it was of course useless for him to express either at present, even had he felt inclined to do so: that he could not, however, say this was the case, since he should have been far better pleased had she remained under the care of the friends with whom he had placed her, and married some one residing in her own country, and of whose character and capacity for making her happy he would have been able to assure himself. Now that the step was taken, however, and could not be undone, he had no wish to pain her or himself by useless, and possibly disregarded reproaches; and could only hope she would never have cause to repent the lot she had chosen, or think regretfully of the home and the father which it was not likely she would ever see again.

To his son-in-law, Mr. Hardy said still less in words; though the substance came to much the same. Mr. Lorimer had taken upon himself to remove his daughter from a safe and comfortable home, put her in a most compromising position, and by so doing extort a technical consent from her guardian *pro tem* to his marrying her. That being so, he was of course prepared to assume the undivided responsibility of

her maintenance, as well as of her happiness and honour in the future; and it was a comfort to Mr. Hardy to be informed that the young gentleman's means were such as to make him capable of fulfilling the former task, at all events. In any case he must expect no assistance, either now or at his father-in-law's death; and all the latter had to add was, that he trusted Mr. Lorimer was at least gentleman enough to treat with kindness the foolish girl who had been imprudent enough to become his wife on such brief acquaintance. Possibly he had no right even to intimate this request; but having done so, he saw no reason for any further correspondence between them.

"In other words, the old fellow thinks I may get wind of *his* marriage in former days, and so says beforehand, 'I don't interfere with you, so don't you interfere with me,'" said Max to himself. "What a hard old flint it is! He doesn't show a spark of feeling for his daughter. Upon my soul, one would think he was *glad* to get rid of her."

Lil, in her quick sensitiveness, was already cowering tearfully under the same conclusion; and perhaps, as things were, Mr. Hardy's want of parental tenderness did more good than he anticipated; for his daughter felt nearly as keenly this final banishment from his heart and home as she had done his refusal to allow her to return to the latter before his own

departure from Uruguay. She was not so strong now as she had been then; and her recent loneliness of spirit in this new land made any show of unkindness from the dear old home so far away strike more cruelly on her heart; so that when Max, moved by the sight of her distress, and indignant with Mr. Hardy for causing it, put his arms round her, and tried to console her, Lil clung to him with a passion he had never seen in her before; begging him with sobs, all the more ungovernable for the restraint she had been putting on her late troubles and anxieties, to be kind to her, to love her as he used to do; for she had no one but him now. Papa did not care for her. He would have forgiven her if he did; and unless Max would——

"But I do! Lil, why should you say that when you know how I love you? How have I made you doubt it? I never doubt your love," Max cried, pressing the fair head against his breast, and kissing its ruffled curls. "Look up, you silly child; didn't I tell you ever so long ago that no father could care for you as I do?"

But the tender heart panting against his own had been more wounded than he in his thoughtlessness knew; and Lil's head was still bowed.

"That was before . . before you knew me so well; and lately, I don't think . . I have been afraid that you were sorry.

I am always vexing you by doing things differently from the people here; but I only do as I did before, when you first knew me; and you did not say then that you wanted me to alter. I would if I could—to please you; but it is all so strange, and meanwhile I feel as if you were slipping away from me. I can't even be of use to you here as I should have been at home. There are servants for everything, and you have no need of me. People do not like me . . . I am *so* alone. . . ."

Max was almost frightened. He had never seen his young wife give way to so much passion and hopelessness. He had had no idea of how much the fault-finding, excitement, and strangeness of her new life had told upon her, and the unhappiness she betrayed fairly shocked him. Between kisses and caresses, sweeter than words, he assured her that he loved her better as she was than any other creature in the world; that her truth, her purity, her absorbing love for himself, were worth more to him than all the perfections of every other woman rolled into one, and that so long as he never found her change in these, he should never change to her.

"While as to your being no use, my darling, it is only this beastly lodging-house life makes you think that," he went on cheerily; "wait till you're installed at the Court

before you talk of being no use. Why, you don't even know what a real English home is yet; and for my part, I shall be glad when you do. I'm getting sick of this sort of thing myself. It's confoundedly expensive; and Erlscourt's people have not shown up at all as I expected. If the Countess doesn't send you a card for that ball she's going to give, I've a good mind to leave town before it. I wonder how long it would take to get the old place in order for us?"

* * * * * *

This was how the departure from London was first talked of; and how it came to pass that one July afternoon, when London streets were choked with dust, and baking with heat; when even the strawberries lost their sweetness in the hoarse, persistent voices of their vendors; when the grass in the parks was beginning to change from green to yellow; and the noise of cabs and carriages at night to madden from its unceasingness; when even Lil was fain to admit that a much less amount of actual heat in London felt far hotter than the summer temperature in Monte San Felipe, and longed vainly for the pure sea-breezes, the lofty rooms and wide doors and windows of the latter place—on such an afternoon, and just at the time when the fashionable world of Erlscourts, Feverfiews, Corianders, and Munchausens were turning into the Park for their usual simmer in the sunshine before five o'clock

tea, Max and his wife were skimming away from town as fast as the Great Western Railway could carry them, and rejoicing with each mile that took them deeper into the green and leafy country.

To Lil it was like the beginning of a new life, the opening of a fresh honeymoon in a home of their own, with no cold-eyed, ill-mannered London people to stare at, and criticise, her experiments and blunders in it. Even the journey (now that she had got more used to railways) was a delightful excitement; and as she leant back in the well-padded corner of the compartment which they had to themselves, with her husband's arm round her, and her eyes fixed on the swiftly-flying panorama of shady woods and verdant meadows, stretches of glittering river dotted over with gay-coloured boats, and fields golden with ripening corn, her head was constantly stretched forward, and her lips parted in delighted admiration.

"Max, how lovely—how lovely it is; and how *green!* I never fancied any country could be so green!" she kept exclaiming. "And look at the little cottages, like Birket Foster's pictures, and the roses on that wall! Max, why did we stay in town so long? I always knew it was the country I should love. Uruguay had nothing like *this*. Oh! I know we shall be happy here."

"What a child it is!" said Max laughing, though not ill-pleased at these commendations on *his* country. But by-and-by Lil's raptures died away in a gentle gravity; and by the time they were reaching Troutbury itself, a tiny, old-fashioned village nestled down among the Kennet meadows, with the river winding like a silver ribbon in and out among them, she had grown rather pale, and Max felt the slender fingers tighten nervously on his arm as they stood on the platform, receiving very cordial and respectful greetings from the old station-master and half a dozen rustic bystanders who had collected to see "Yoong Squire an' his lady come whoam."

Max answered them with an airy word or two by no means expressive of his inward pride and satisfaction in the situation, and hurried his wife into a neat one-horse brougham which was waiting outside; enjoying her startled, happy flush as he whispered to her:

"This is yours, Lil. I shall only ride in it when you let me."

Lil looked up at him wonderingly. Louie had once said to her, "Think of Pedro's *carriage*, Lil!" but somehow she had never thought of the possibility of Max giving her one; and as they bowled along a country lane, and Max, pointing to a mossy park-wall which bordered it on one side, said:

"This is our own park, you know. We shall see the Court in another moment;" there was an almost awe-struck look on her happy face which made him laugh.

"How grave my wife is grown of a sudden!" he said laughing. "What is it, Lil? Are you thinking you would rather have one of the Birket Foster cottages, or dreading all the orders you will have to give Mrs. Berkley and the rest of the women-servants to-morrow? They will come to you for them the first thing, you know, and will hate and despise you for ever after if they are not exactly the same as they have been used to."

Lil laughed too, and shook her head.

"In that case I shall leave the orders to you till I know exactly what they ought to be," she said gaily; but Max was in a teasing mood.

"Oh dear no. I can't interfere with indoor matters. They are your province. And then there are the callers. Perhaps you were thinking of them; the Berkshire ladies who look on London ones as dangerously broad and unconventional in their ideas, and on every foreigner as a cross between a Jesuit and an ourang-outang. I hope you are prepared for them, Lil, and for being catechised on every point of your views and 'bringing-up', and judged accordingly. You must be *very* careful; for all the peace and

happiness of our future life depends on what the judgment is."

"Max, you are bent on frightening me. How bad of you!" said Lil, trying to smile still, but her tell-tale lips were trembling a little; and Max was in such high good-humour that if he had not had to lean forward just then and nod and smile to the lodge-keeper who was holding back the gate for them and curtseying to the ground, he would have comforted his timid wife with a kiss.

"I am not bad at all," he said triumphantly. "I should be if I was *really* going to leave you to be worried and harried by all these awfulnesses; but I determined some time ago that that shouldn't be—that I wouldn't have you worn-out with cares and worries before you had had time to enjoy yourself and look about you; and so, without saying anything about it, I sent off for Alice, and told her she must really come down and help you through your first experiences. I said it would be very unkind if she didn't, and the dear good girl consented at once. She has been here a week already, getting the house in order for you; and—look out, Lil! quick! There's the house; and, by Jove! there's Alice, too, on the watch for us. What do you think of the old place?"

But Lil could not answer; could not say anything at all.

Even the fine old beeches and Portugal laurels in the drive seemed to swim before her eyes, and the square, solid, red-brick house beyond to rock and sway. All she saw, all that she was conscious of, was the figure of a tall woman in a black dress standing under the portico gazing out at them as they drove up, and all her happy anticipations, her glad light-heartedness and bravery, seemed to die away and faint within her.

"Ah, Alice! So here we are, you see," she heard her husband say, and the answer:

"At last! Dear Max, I am so glad!" and then brother and sister had met and kissed; and Alice Duncan was standing at the carriage-door, saying in a sweet, full voice, with the softest touch of Scotch in it:

"I hope you are not very tired, Lil. You'll let me be the first after Max to say welcome?"

She bent down her face as she spoke; and Lil, half-shrinking back from the proffered kiss, saw, with a strange shock of surprise and pain, that it was the sweetest she had ever looked on in all her life.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

"I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a woman too!
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet.

. . . . . .

A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, and command."—*Wordsworth.*

"The stately homes of England, how beautiful they stand."
Hemans.

LIL had only a confused sense of the next few minutes. They went into a square, stone-paved hall, with a huge fireplace filled with ferns and flowering-plants at one end, and the walls hung with antlers and other trophies of the chase. There was a little group of people assembled there, a man-servant in livery, a stout female person, who might be either cook or housekeeper, and three or four capped and ribbonded younger women, who all smiled and curtsied as

the gentry came in; and Max held out his hand to the stout lady and said:

"Ha, Mrs. Berkley! this looks like old times to have you back here. I'm glad to see you."

Mrs. Berkley curtsied lower than ever, and said, huskily:

"And I'm glad to be back, sir, and able to give you and your lady a hearty welcome;" and then Lil, feeling that it was expected of her, put out her soft fingers, and tried to smile too. The effort was a faint one, however, and not a word would come with it. She was relieved that Max made no further pause, but drew her quickly onward, and through a doorway into a large, low-ceilinged room, with panelled walls of creamy white, picked out with gold; a tall "Queen Anne" mantel-piece of carved wood, with flying cherubs and wreaths of flowers painted in the same colours; and three long windows opening out on to a lawn, as shaven, smooth, and green as emerald-piled velvet, and sloping gently down to the banks of a little river, shut in by a belt of trees on the further side. There was nothing grand in the room, which was rather over-filled with pretty modern furniture covered in fresh chintz, and was redolent of the scent of roses and other flowers shedding forth their sweetness from every bowl, vase, and basket where they could find a place. Rather it had an air of delicate comfort and homely prettiness,

which was enhanced by the golden light of the afternoon sunshine streaming in on everything, and investing with a tender, mystic, glorified haze what might otherwise have looked commonplace enough. Lil was glad to take advantage of the dazzling rays to cover her eyes for a moment as she leaned back in a corner of the comfortable settee where Max had placed her while he turned to his sister, and, laying his hands on her shoulders, said in a tone which somehow struck the young wife as one she had never heard from him before:

"And how are you after all your labours, Alice? You look a little more natural to me now than you did in that flying visit last week. I don't think you're so much changed after all, old lady."

"I don't think I am changed at all; not for you, at any rate, Max dear," said Miss Duncan, smiling, though (to Lil's mind) there was a wistful expression about the firm, sweet mouth, and something like moisture in the tender eyes. She pulled her brother's handsome head down to her lips and kissed him, adding, "*You* are changed, however: you are certainly better-looking for your wanderings, if it will not make your lordship unbearably conceited to be told so. Will it, Lil?" turning to the shy bride with ready grace, "You are the best judge of that."

"I—I don't know. I think—all men are conceited," she

answered, trying to speak naturally, but making such a failure of it, and colouring so vividly as she did so, that Max looked at her in surprise.

"What's the matter, Lil?" he asked wonderingly. "Surely you are not bashful! I thought you never were."

"Then she certainly will not begin by being so in her own house," said Alice kindly, "but I dare say she is tired, Max. Two hours' railway journeying in this hot, dusty weather is rather exhausting to us of the weaker sex; and if you touch the bell for tea I don't doubt Lil will be glad. I ordered it to be ready directly you came."

Lil said, "Thank you." It was all she could find breath for; and she did not wonder that Max looked at her with some displeasure. The wonder was that Miss Duncan herself did not appear offended at the cool reception given to her affectionate kindness; but rather seemed anxious to distract her brother's attention from it by talking to him of various matters connected with the property; and, when the tea came, serving Lil with it, and the cakes and strawberries which accompanied it, with quiet carefulness: not saying much to her, but seeing that she had everything she could wish; and as soon as the meal had been partaken of, suggesting to Max that he should show his wife to her room.

"I will tell Palmer to go to you there," she said; but she

did not offer to play the show-woman herself, or accompany her sister-in-law; and Lil felt thankful. If she could only get somewhere *by herself*—be alone for a few minutes, she might be able to recover her self-command so as to behave better; but oh! if Max had only warned her earlier!

He was looking decidedly cross at present; and hardly waited till they were inside the large, luxuriously-furnished bed-room—more luxurious than Lil's primitive notions of sleeping arrangements had given her any conception of—before he said in an irritated tone:

"Are you so *very* tired, Lil? You didn't seem so in the train; but I don't know what else there can be to make you so unlike yourself. Your manner to Alice down-stairs was exactly as if you objected to have her here; though she only came at my entreaty to get the place ready for you; and has been working like a horse at it ever since. I must say it seemed beastly ungrateful."

Lil blushed guiltily.

"Oh, Max, I did not mean to be so. I am very sorry. It—it was most kind of her to come," she stammered, hating herself for being unable to add that she was glad Miss Duncan had done so; but positively incapable of uttering so prodigious a falsehood. Max, however, was no finer of perception than usual.

"Then why couldn't you *say* so? I hope you're not going to take an absurd prejudice against her because she's your sister-in-law. Very few sisters, I can tell you, would have been as eager and unselfish as she about making everything pretty, bright, and homelike for us in a place which, but for us, might have been her own. I can't tell you the trouble she went to to find out Mrs. Berkley, who used to be cook here in my schoolboy days, and was very fond of me; and then her giving up Palmer—I thought that *was* very jolly of her."

"Giving up—who?" asked Lil timidly. If only Max knew how every word of his hurt her; but it was part of her punishment that it should be so; and he could not help it.

"Well, she said I wasn't to tell you; but as you don't seem to take over well to her, I will. Palmer was my mother's maid, you know, and the best one she ever had; helped Alice to nurse her through her last illness; and was so much attached to them both that when the Colonel broke up the establishment here, Palmer was the only servant kept on. She said she couldn't bear to leave Alice; and Alice was too fond of her to let her go; so they've been together ever since, till I said the other day (not knowing of this) how much I should like to get her back for you. I thought it would be such a grand thing if you could have some one

about you who wouldn't rob, and take advantage of you as those London servant-girls did; and Alice declared at once you should have her, and—— Ah! Palmer, come in, your mistress is wanting you. I've just been telling her that you were my poor mother's maid before; and I only hope you will be as attentive to my wife as you were to her. Ta, ta, Lil. I must go now, and if I were you I should lie down for a bit since you are so tired."

"Oh thank you! I should like it—if I might," Lil said, eagerly; but her husband was already gone; and only Palmer remained, saying respectfully:

"You do look very tired, ma'am. If you would let me wheel the couch near the window for you, and draw down the blind, you could rest and enjoy the air while I am unpacking your things and putting out what you want for dinner."

"What time is dinner?" asked Lil, as she thanked her and obeyed, glad of the prospect of a respite before again facing her sister-in-law, and only anxious to know how long it would last.

"Miss Duncan ordered it for seven to-day, ma'am; but of course you and the young master—I beg pardon, the master —will fix it afterwards as you please. Miss Duncan told Mrs. Berkley so particularly."

The woman spoke in a very pleasant manner; and Lil thought she looked a mild-natured, pleasant person; and felt emboldened to go on talking.

"My husband says you have been in the family a long time. I suppose" (smiling) "he *was* quite young when you first knew him."

"Oh yes, ma'am, not more than ten years old, I should think, and a dear, beautiful young gentleman he was, so full of fun and high spirits 'twas no wonder my poor mistress and Miss Alice made the idol of him they did. Not that I was lady's-maid then, ma'am. I was only a girl of seventeen myself, and used to come in from the village where I lived to help Mrs. Dolman, the then maid, with plain sewing and such like; but shortly after that Miss Alice had a long, bad illness, and needed so much attention I was taken in altogether to wait upon her. It was she taught me how to do hair, and a lot of things; and so, when Mrs. Dolman left to be married, my mistress gave me the place, for all that I was barely twenty then and she had always been used to an older person about her."

Lil was silent for a moment. She longed to ask whether Mrs. Duncan had been much attached to her step-daughter, or under her influence. Somehow the idea that it might be so had never struck her before; but she was too much of a lady to put the question, and only said:

"And you have been with her and Miss Duncan ever since?"

"Yes, ma'am, over eleven years it is, and many a sad change in the last six, owing to my old mistress's death; and Mr. Max--Mr. Lorimer, I beg your pardon, ma'am!—leaving home; and then the Colonel giving up the house and taking to that wandering life between Scotland and the sea-side. It do seem quite natural to be back here again. I never had any fancy for moving about."

"But I suppose—after being so many years in the family—you did not like to leave Miss Duncan for that reason only?'

"No, ma'am, I did not; but, begging your pardon, I don't think I should have *liked* to have left her, if I'd only been twelve months in her service. If there ever was a sweet young lady and a real angel on earth it's Miss Alice, as I dare say the master has told you before."

Lil felt herself colouring violently. Who was it? Not Max——Ah! she remembered now, Captain Carnegie!—who had said of Alice Duncan that she was "one of God's angels". Why had Max spoken so differently, so lightly and peevishly, in his first allusions to her and his home relations? He had evidently a hearty, brotherly respect and affection for his step-sister at present. Was it only that strange English hatred

of demonstrativeness which had led him to mislead his wife, and do injustice both to the other woman and his own good feelings?

"He has told me how . . . how devoted Miss Duncan was to her father," she said with some embarrassment.

"Yes, indeed, ma'am, and to her mother too; for no one could have told Mrs. Duncan wasn't her real mother; and, as I've heard from Mrs. Berkley, Miss Alice didn't know it herself, till she was quite a big girl, and nearly cried herself sick the day her father told her. I believe she'd have cut off her hand any day to serve Mrs. Duncan; and my dear lady was nigh as fond of her, and depended on her as if she had been her own daughter; though of course she couldn't *help* making more of Mr. Max."

"But I suppose Miss Duncan's father made more of her; so that was only fair," said Lil, trying to smile and speak as if she were merely pursuing the conversation for the sake of kindness and affability.

"Colonel Duncan, ma'am, never made much of anybody except his wife. He didn't like children: spoilt ones least of all; and perhaps because he thought my mistress did spoil Mr. Max he wouldn't do the same by Miss Alice. She had a sad time, poor young lady, after my lady died, and her step-brother went to college; but she was just as sweet and

cheerful as ever through the whole of it; and even in her great trouble, when any one with half an eye could see as her heart was breaking within her——Do you feel the breeze nicely there, ma'am? you look very pale—she never gave way, or shut herself up; or even left off for a day reading to and amusing her papa, just as she was in the habit of doing."

Lil had turned her face towards the window, perhaps in search of that faint summer breeze. It did not bring much colour to her white cheeks, as she asked in a low, constrained voice:

"What——trouble?"

"Mr. Melville's death, ma'am: the gentleman, you know, as she was to have been married to. He and his family were among her oldest friends, seeing as their place is quite near to the Lodge, as the Colonel's cottage in Scotland is called; but he was murdered, as maybe you've heard, ma'am, in a rising among the natives out in some furrin' place; and it pretty nigh killed my poor young lady at the time: all the more that her one comfort would have been to be with his people; and the Colonel was terribly jealous both of him and them."

Lil looked up indignantly.

"But how wicked of him! How cruel!" she exclaimed with quick girlish warmth, which made Palmer like her.

"Well, ma'am, he was a selfish gentleman; and Miss Duncan is one of those who don't know what self is. The way she used to stand up for Mr. Max (if you'll excuse me saying it) would have made you love her, though you hadn't wanted to; and it angered her father dreadfully; yet when her own trouble came, it often used to go to my heart to see her come down in the morning with her poor eyes ringed round with signs of the tears which she wouldn't vex him by shedding in the day. Which dress will you please to wear this evening, ma'am?"

"I—I don't care . . any one, the black lace," said Lil huskily. Her face was turned away again, and the tears were running down her own cheeks. It was not for a few minutes that she said, with something of fresh indignation in her voice:

"I wonder you can leave such a mistress to come to me."

"And you are right, ma'am, I could not—if you will let me make so bold as to say so—but that she urged me to do it. She knew Scotland didn't agree with me; and she said that if her home was to be with Lady Melville she would have no need of a maid of her own, as Miss Janie's woman could wait on both of them; and that Mr. Lorimer had a fancy to have me back because of my having been with his mother. Miss Alice said it would *please* her for me

to be with you; and I hope, ma'am, I shall be able to please you too. Would you not like to take a little sleep now, till the dressing-bell rings? I have put all your things ready."

Lil said that she would, and Palmer went noiselessly away; but there was no sleep for her young mistress in the hour that followed. With keen sympathy and generous remorse she was seeing the picture of this martyred, selfless life, reft of home and mother, father and lover, cramped in its friendships, stinted in its natural prerogatives, and crushed in the love and flower of its womanhood—beside her own, so selfish, so frivolous, so full of vague discontents and rebellious wilfulnesses. And she had dared to mock at this other one, to call it grim, illiberal, and sanctimonious: she whose hand had helped (however innocently) to deal the heaviest blow that had yet fallen on it: who was now reigning in the place in which (but for Max's marriage with her) his sister might have found comfort even for her widowed affections for many years to come.

It did not occur to Lil, in the personal humility which was deeply present in her, that had she been as selfish and heartless as she considered herself, all this would not have afflicted her at all. On the contrary, she went down to dinner with such a sense of guilt on her, that when Alice spoke to her she could not smile, and only answered in

embarrassed monosyllables: preferring to listen when she could to the brother and sister's familiar chat and interchange of question and reminiscence on a thousand matters which would have been Greek to her, if Miss Duncan, with the gentle grace which seemed part of her character, had not turned to her every now and then with an explanatory word. They all went into the drawing-room together after dinner, and Lil found, to her great relief, that instead of seeming angry with her for her taciturnity and stiffness during the meal, Max was quite kind in urging her to rest in the corner of the settee, and amuse herself by gazing out at the moonlight drawing weird pictures in black and white of the stately elm-trees on the silvered lawn, and glittering on heaps of wan white roses and regal lilies as with a rain of diamonds: the while he and Alice at the piano "discoursed sweet music" from sundry old books bearing the faded initials of their several names.

On coming down from the bed-room indeed earlier in the afternoon he had gone to his step-sister with the eager question:

"Well, what do you think of her?" uttered with such half-defiant, wholly boyish anxiety that Alice could not help smiling as she answered cordially:

"Why, Max, I never saw any one so beautiful. The photograph you sent me did not half tell what a bonny

creature she was; and it is a sweet bonniness too. I could not wonder at any one falling in love with her."

Max looked as he felt, intensely gratified. Except from Erlscourt this was the heartiest commendation of his choice he had yet heard; and he valued his sister's opinion more than he would have liked to own.

"I am glad you think so," he said, laughing. "I felt sure you'd like her, and you haven't seen her at all at her best. She wasn't like herself just now; but you mustn't think she's cold usually. She didn't mean it; she told me so. It was only the strangeness—and that she was tired, and—and all that."

"I hope you didn't oblige her to tell you so," said Alice pleasantly. "Do you think I can't fancy how she felt, poor child! a stranger to the place and us, and just crossing the threshold of a home which she had never seen before, and yet which she knew was to be hers for life. Most women would feel solemn at such a moment; but no one with eyes in their head could look into those beautiful ones of hers and think her *cold*."

"Ah, well, I'm glad you didn't," said Max, relieved. "Somehow the London women didn't seem to get on with her at all; but you always manage to understand everybody; and that was why I wanted you to come and be a friend to her."

"I would be that to any wife of yours, if she would let me, dear; but it comes easy with such a shy, winsome-looking thing as this. Is she delicate, Max? I hope you didn't let her tire herself too much before starting. She looks a very tender plant, and one that I doubt you'll have to take good care of."

Max felt rather uncomfortable. It certainly was the case that he had got into the way of late of letting his wife run after him, and wait on him much more than he would at all have imagined himself doing in the first days of his married life; and that only that morning she had been folding coats, cording books, and strapping portmanteaus, while he reclined in an easy-chair, and read the morning paper. Perhaps it was her tacitly-assumed inferiority, or the fact that she herself was a very "willing horse", which had made him permit these things; but Alice's words, gently as they were spoken, gave him, as they so often did, an uncomfortable twinge; and he was glad to escape the subject by exclaiming:

"By the way, Ally, I don't wonder at your admiring Lil, for—it's rather amusing, and, 'pon my word, it never struck me before—but do you know you're not at all unlike one another. Now, you needn't laugh as if you thought that was a bit of soft sawder to 'come over' you with, as our old nurse used to say. I don't mean that your features are the

same; and, of course, you are taller and larger made than she; but the shape of your face, and your fairness, and something in your eyes (what is it? the colour, or the expression when you're both looking grave) is wonderfully alike; and I saw it plainly just now when you were standing together."

Alice Duncan did not laugh. On the contrary, a sudden light and flush had come into the face he was speaking of, and she broke in on his words with unwonted excitement.

"Do you really think so? I—it never occurred to me; but, oh! I wonder if it was—if it could have been *she*——" She stopped short, the last word faltering on her lips. Whatever the thought suggested, it was one which brought with it a rush of memory too painful to be put into words; and with the long instinct of self-repression, rendered facile by custom she turned aside, pressing her fingers tightly together, while the tears, which for a moment had welled up into those patient eyes, were slowly driven back again. But when Max, after a laughing reiteration of his assertion, and an entreaty that she would not be overcome by the flattering import of it, had gone off to the stables, Miss Duncan went to her own room, and, unlocking a little cabinet which stood on the table by the bed, took from it a letter written on foreign note-paper, limp and worn with oft perusing, and read and

re-read one passage in it, looking between whiles at the reflection of herself in the long mirror opposite.

It was certainly no beautiful sylph-like girl she saw standing there, but a woman of eight-and-twenty, with a full, nobly-moulded figure, clad in plain, deep mourning, unrelieved save by a tiny band of white at the throat and wrists; an oval, fair-complexioned face with grave blue eyes, liquid and simple as a child's, but with all a woman's earnestness in their clear depths; and fair, soft hair, unbrightened by the gold which glinted on every thread of Lil's, and drawn simply back in a waving line from her face into a coil at the back, and confined by a broad snood of white crape.

It had been one of Colonel Duncan's pet "fads" that Scotch maidens should wear the Scottish snood, and those who knew the tender fidelity of his daughter's temperament, were not surprised at her continuing after his death to comply with any of those minor rules (not affecting others) on which he had insisted in his lifetime, but the bright blue ribbon snood had been exchanged for this white one when she first came down in her mourning dress after the tidings of Frank Melville's murder; and those who saw it, and knew her best, knew too that it was as a badge of widowhood more than virginity, that she wore it now, and that it would never be changed as long as life lasted in her. Now as she gazed at

herself the tears rose afresh to her eyes, and she murmured:

"I can't see it; but if *he* did—if it was so, I should be inclined to love her still more. But Max said she did not know him: had only seen him once. I wonder if he could have been mistaken. Perhaps she will tell me herself soon. She must know I would give half my life for one word of him!"

CHAPTER III.

A NAME FROM THE PAST.

"My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming,
I love not less, though less the love appear."
Shakespeare's Sonnets.

"For a fearful time
We can keep down the flood-gates of the heart;
But we must draw them some time, or 'twill burst,
And drain itself too dry."—*Philip Bailey.*

"Letting I dare not wait upon I would."—*Macbeth*, Act I.

Lil's first awakening on the following morning was to sensations of more courage and cheerfulness than those which had oppressed her the evening before, and gone so far to spoil all the pleasures of her home-coming. Perhaps physical fatigue had in a certain degree contributed to the terror of depression which had overcome her then; or perhaps her sister-in-law's graceful calm of manner, and the way in which (while receiving every affectionate attention from her) she, Lil, had been let alone, and not forced to talk or exert herself, had had a reassuring effect. Anyhow, when she opened her eyes after a good night's sleep, and saw the

sunshine dancing in through every chink and cranny of the carefully-drawn curtains on the large yet cosy room; the dainty chintz hangings and covers flowered over with roses, and lined with glossy pink; the luxurious sofa and arm-chairs; the writing-table, with all its carefully-arranged appurtenances and adorned with a great china bowl of deep blue Valauris full of honeysuckle; the high wainscoting and mantel-shelf in fluted white wood, and pretty inlaid furniture of American birch and walnut; the pictures and engravings; chief of all, the half-length portrait of a beautiful young woman in a low-necked dress, smiling at her with Max's eyes from the post of honour over the fire-place; she felt her heart beating fast with a kind of wondering pleasure, an innocent self-importance in her own personality and surroundings, new and agreeable enough to make her glad to lie still for some minutes and enjoy the sensation without seeking to improve on or disturb it.

Max had risen early, and gone out without disturbing her, and all around was a silence and stillness for which the last four months in London had left her entirely unprepared; and which, in itself, seemed to give her mind room for wider and calmer thoughts than she had been capable of yesterday.

To her warm-hearted and impulsive nature, never given to

churlish suspicions of her fellow-creatures, or withholding of the meed due to them until tested by lengthened experience, it was only too clear that, accidentally or not, her husband had allowed her to fall into an entirely erroneous opinion of his step-sister, and one which he neither shared nor wished her to maintain. Had he felt otherwise, however, Lil could not have done so. There was no single thing in Alice Duncan's face, voice, or manner, in her bearing towards herself, or in all she heard of her from others, which did not impress her with a sense of womanly sweetness and integrity: a delicacy born, not of good manners only, but of ready sympathy and perfect unselfishness, which moved her young sister-in-law with a strange longing to cling to her and confide in her, as if, instead of a stranger, she were a sister indeed: one like and yet differing from and even better than, those for whom the girl's heart so often ached with fruitless yearnings.

And this was the worst of it! To feel this longing, this sense of perfect trust and security that if gratified it would not be disappointed, and not to be *able* to gratify it: to know that by no fault of her own, rather by a terrible misfortune, she was shut out from the friendship which might have been so valuable, the tenderness which seemed so all-embracing it must surely have had some fibres to twine round hers.

All of a sudden there came back to her that conversation with Frank Melville at the *Quinta Disgraciada*, and she understood, as nothing in the past—not even Carnegie's brutal explanations—had ever made her understand before, of whom he had been thinking when he spoke of women being the good angels and guiding pole-stars of their homes, however adverse in outward seeming the latter might be: of the power for external good in their own truth and nobleness, and of the reward attendant thereon. It was not of *her* he had been thinking! She had not been in his mind at all; but rather this gracious, noble, sweet-natured woman, whose life had so well fitted her both to be his wife and point the moral of all he said; and there had been no slightest call for Lil's maidenly trepidations or her hasty flight to check further outpourings. She could see it all now, as in a flash of light, reflected from those sweet, sad eyes, which had looked into hers as Alice Duncan kissed her in the carriage: see it with no petty anger or offence; but with a humbled consciousness that the fact of her previous misinterpretation of it formed a sort of justification of Captain Carnegie's taunts, and an additional bar against acceptance of her sister-in-law's manifest goodwill.

Morally timid, and even cowardly, as Lil might be, there was no meanness or dishonesty in her character. It was as

impossible to her to take kindness or affection to which she had no right; or of which (no matter how) she had rendered herself unworthy, as it would have been to pilfer from a neighbour's purse or larder; while to confess to Alice the share she had had in bringing about the great misfortune of the latter's life, and leave it to the other woman's nobility of character to accept or reject her in consequence, was rendered equally impossible by her previous silence to Max and her promise to Carnegie. She could not tell her sister-in-law what she had withheld from her husband, neither could she tell her part without telling her the whole: more especially if Carnegie had been right when he said that such knowledge would only add a more cruel bitterness to the pain of Melville's loss in the hearts of his betrothed wife and family.

No, there was nothing for it but to hold her peace, and (in order that she might do so) to avoid anything like intimacy or confidences with Alice Duncan, no matter how delightful either might seem, or how difficult such avoidance might be. If she had been silly or vain or imprudent before, she must pay the penalty for it now. It would be a very cruel one, and all the more so because her fellow-victim and unconscious judge was a person so lovable in herself, and so manifestly willing to love her; but at least it would have the redeeming sweetness of self-sacrifice

(always dear to young imaginings) in it. If Alice still suffered, as every intonation of her voice, every fold of her black gown told that she suffered for her lover's death, Lil would suffer with her. She would not be the selfish, happy bride, exulting in a gain which only accentuated her sister's loss. She would bear her share of the burden, and take comfort at least in the thought that she had lifted it voluntarily.

A knock at the door heralded the entrance of Palmer with a cup of tea, and the question of when she would like to dress; and not only roused her from these reflections, but brought back the pleasanter sense of her new mistress-ship. She became eager to get up; and as soon as the maid was gone, sprang out of bed, and drawing aside the window-curtains looked eagerly out.

A pleasant prospect for any one to gaze on lay before her. Still more for the young South American brought up among no more picturesque or verdant surroundings than rectangular streets of stuccoed houses, with glimpses of bright blue sea at the end of each; or miles on miles of arid pasture-land, covered with yellowish grass; shallow, muddy *arroyos* bordered by stunted willows; and here and there an isolated *adobe* ranch, fenced in by a hedge of sun-blackened, dusty cacti. The bed-room here looked out on the same view as the

drawing-room beneath; but seen in the morning sunshine, with the golden light shining over everything, the mossy greenness of the lawn, the deep shadows of the cedars and feathery ones of the limes which fringed it round, and, in conjunction with an invisible wire fence, divided it from the park beyond; the pretty river, blue and jocund in the sunshine, brown and glassy in the shadows, the tall trees fringing it on its further side; the tower of the village church and gabled vicarage just peeping through the boughs, and giving a suggestion of neighbouring but sufficiently distant human intercourse; the deep-hued masses of colour in the trim flower-beds, the scent of roses and jasmine and new-mown hay, the song and twitter of a thousand birds; more than all, the sweet, pure air, full of delicate coolness and invigoration, helped to fill her with a wonder of delight, and she made haste to bathe and dress, trying not to show her unaccustomedness to assistance in the latter task; and looking so entrancingly fresh and lovely when it was finished, and the last touch had been given to her shining hair and dainty morning gown, that Palmer could not help exclaiming:

"Dear me, ma'am, what a pleasure it must be to dress you for a ball! I should think there couldn't be another lady who would look so beautiful."

Lil laughed at her with good-tempered, girlish pleasure

in the compliment, and made haste down-stairs to the breakfast-room, where Max and his step-sister were already waiting for her; but she received a little shock of surprise, when, after the morning greeting had been exchanged, her husband, colouring very much, said:

"Lil, we are going to—to have family prayers. We always did before, in my mother's time, and Alice thinks it would be a pity not—not to go on in the same way, eh? What do you think?"

"*I?* Oh, I think it would be very nice, Max," Lil said, rather breathlessly; for hitherto she had never seen any signs of religious feeling in her husband, but, on the contrary, had felt any expression of her own checked by his lightness of tone respecting it. To see him seat himself at the head of the table, and open the huge family bible, while all the servants filed in with subdued and solemn faces, and took their seats on a row of chairs facing him, was a new revelation to the young wife, and suggested the idea that Max in his own home might again be a different Max from the London or South American one; but the majestic beauty of the sacred words which followed, and the low-toned fervour of Alice Duncan's responses to the brief and simple prayers, brought a new rush of feeling with them; and she rose from her knees, not only soothed and calmed beyond expectation, but with

a sense of having in some sort assisted at the consecration of the new life just beginning: a state of mind upon which Max's abrupt transition to hurrying breakfast, and launching out vituperations against some one who had not answered a letter as expected, acted with an almost painful shock.

Familiarity, as we all know, however, breeds contempt; and even such sacred personages as bishops and rectors have been known at times to regard the ceremony of family prayers in a somewhat perfunctory light. Poor Max was no more consciously irreverent than any other young man of his age and *de son siècle;* but, having a distinct vision in his mind of his step-father seated in the place he now occupied, and leading the psalms in a harsh Scotch accent, while he himself, with one mischievous eye on Alice's imploring face, was endeavouring to project a dried pea in such a manner as to take the elder gentleman in the calf of the leg, and yet give no testimony of whence it came; he might be excused for exhibiting a certain amount of mingled embarrassment and levity at finding himself for the first time in the same official position.

The rest of the day passed as if on wings, and so did those that followed: so swiftly indeed that Lil scarcely knew where they went, and certainly had no time for thought, or anything beyond the affairs of the moment as they occurred.

There was the house to inspect, first of all; and though nothing more than a square-built, moderately-sized family residence, of the Georgian era and the style with which Caldecott's picture-books have so much familiarised us of late; it was of course deeply interesting to Lil, not only as the first English country house, even on a small scale, that she had ever been in, but as her husband's birth-place, and the scene of all his childish exploits and adventures. There were the grounds too; the high-walled kitchen-gardens, lined round with plums and peaches and cherries, white and crimson, and crammed with vegetables, many of which Lil only knew by name, and scarcely that; the park, scarcely big enough to be worthy of the title, but beautiful with fine old thorn-trees and stately elms, and giving dignity to the house which it embraced; the village, which was about half a mile distant, and reached by an avenue of limes with the Kennet water-meadows on either side; the grey, square-towered Norman church with its "High" vicar, and hard-working, anxious-looking "vicaress", fresh-comers since Max's boyhood, and nervously anxious to "make sure" of the new Squire and his wife, and ascertain the "soundness" of their proclivities; the servants, the cottage tenantry, even the animals, especially Max's horse, a strong brown hunter, who seemed to take pleasure in the pressure of Lil's soft cheek

against his glossy neck; as well as in her enthusiastic delight over his perfections and those of the tidy little mare appropriated to her own brougham.

There was so much to do and see and enjoy, and Max was so proud and happy in being showman where everything turned either on himself or his family, that Lil was constantly out and about with him, and therefore saw less of her sister-in-law than she had anticipated; though the painful interest which she felt in the latter made her keenly conscious throughout of the delicate unobtrusiveness which kept Alice in the background whenever she was not really wanted; as well as of the constant tact and thoughtfulness with which (while assisting her brother's wife to commence her new rule over the establishment on the same lines of comfort and orderliness for which it had always been notorious) she tried to make it appear that the success was owing to Lil's undivided efforts, and to ingratiate her in every way with those under her.

There are no people more critical, bigoted, and hard to please than servants, paupers, and those of the lower orders that happen to be dependent on you generally; and despite all Lil's real eagerness to fill her new position well and worthily, her pretty readiness to learn, and frank acceptance of her blunders, more especially of her warm, impulsive

sympathy with the poor and suffering in the neighbourhood, she might more easily than not have made enemies, and provoked disrespect, jealousy, or rebellion, if it had not been for the clear eye, soft voice, and ready hands always at her service, though never obtruded or officious.

Also in that still more crucial period, when the local and county families began to call, and Max (with customary male selfishness) beat a prompt retreat, Lil would hardly have known what to do, or how to avoid the pit-falls which in London had so often engulfed her unwary feet, but for Alice, who told her all about the people beforehand, described their various idiosyncrasies and claims to intimacy, deference, or simple politeness; and by her own frankly-shown liking and admiration for the beautiful young foreigner reigning in her place, contributed greatly to the good reception given to the latter by their country neighbours.

Max was delighted at the unexpected smoothness with which the wheels of life seemed to be running, and told Lil with good-humoured patronage that she was immensely improved; and he only wondered she couldn't have managed to hit it off as well with the people in London, and not shock them in the way she had done; but Lil, in her candid heart, knew well to whom the real credit was due, and but for that nobly-meant and mistaken resolution of hers, would

have liked, twenty times over, to throw her arms round her new sister's neck, and tell her how much she loved her, and how grateful and indebted she was to her.

As it was, the shyness and reserve in her manner towards Miss Duncan were all the more marked for being so difficult to keep up; and by-and-bye attracted some displeased attention from her husband himself.

"I really can't understand you, Lil," he said one day. "What makes you so freezing and disagreeable in your manner to Alice? Nothing can be kinder or more affectionate than she is to you. She always seems to be helping you, and yet never puts herself forward, or takes anything on herself in the way some elder sisters do; but you hardly ever kiss her, or seem to like to be left alone with her for a moment; and even when she talks to you of your own home and the people there, you answer her shortly, and as if you were afraid of committing yourself in some way. I can't understand you."

Lil blushed violently.

"But, Max, in—in London you did not like me to talk about Monte San Felipe and the girls. You said so, don't you remember, and how you made me cry because I thought it so unkind of you?"

"Pshaw! that was different, and I didn't mean to be

unkind to you, you silly girl, or make you cry either. It was only because I didn't want the people there to be laughing at you, or thinking you outlandish and queer. Alice is quite another matter, and you have no call to snub her or answer like an automaton as you do when she asks you questions about South America. She really takes an interest in the place—I suppose because of poor Melville having been killed there. By the way, does she ever talk to you about him?"

"No," said Lil, trembling. How well she knew that the reason was her own ceaseless care never to give Alice an opening for so doing.

"Ah! Well, so much the better. After all, it's more than two years ago now, and I dare say she's beginning to forget him. There's no earthly use in going on moping for a person when they're dead and gone; and she's eight-and-twenty now, and ought to make hay while the sun shines, if she's going to do it at all. I shouldn't wonder, you know, if she were to marry well yet; for she's a capital housekeeper, and has a fine figure; and then as *my* sister——"

Lil turned away with a little flash of impatience. Were men *all* the same, she wondered? Had they no eyes to see, no hearts to read the women who were so much worthier even than the best of them? Max, with all his faults, was

still the best and dearest of living men to her who was so sensitively conscious of her own shortcomings; but in her young enthusiasm for what was better and higher than either of them, she could have risen up just then and made hot and scornful protest against the complacent shallowness of that sentence of his. *Alice Duncan* "make hay while the sun shone", or seek to marry on the strength of her good figure and housekeeping—she whose left hand bore for its sole ornament Frank Melville's betrothal ring, and whose beautiful eyes looked out from under that widow-like fillet with the perfect patience of an undying sorrow, an eternal fidelity! How *could* Max be so blind? But he was equally so at present, for he even misunderstood her pettish gesture, and answered it with grave surprise.

"Come, come, Lil, this isn't worthy of you. You might let me give poor Alice that much praise at least, without being jealous. I never said she was a beauty like you. But I see what it is, you've made up your mind to dislike her; and I suppose she knows it, and that that's why she's going away."

"*Going away!* Max!"

"Yes, she says the Melvilles want her, and that she is sure we can do without her now. *I'm* sure I don't wonder she thinks so when you keep her at arm's-length in the way you

do; but I must say it's deuced hard that the only sister I have should be turned out of the home which has been hers all these years, and forced to take up her residence with these canting Scotch folks, because my wife can't put up with her in the house for a few weeks. I don't believe you would have liked it if I had treated those sisters of yours so."

"Oh! Max—but—but indeed you are wrong," Lil stammered remorsefully. For one fleeting moment a guilty throb of relief had shot through the girl's troubled breast at that word "going away"; but long before her husband had finished speaking, the nobler spirit in her swept it away in a gust of self-contempt, and she answered with almost tearful eagerness: "You are quite wrong. I do not know any one—no, not any one, I like as much as your sister. She is better than the best woman I have ever known, except the dear Miss Madrèras; and I do not want her to go away from here. I should be miserable if she thought I did; and I will go now if you like and beg her not to do so."

In effect she did so the same day: urging her petition with so much cordiality and earnestness as to take Alice by surprise, and almost dissipate the idea (slowly and reluctantly formed) that this fair young sister-in-law, whom she herself heartily liked, was not inclined to reciprocate that feeling. Still she did not at once agree to the prettily urged

request, fearing that it might have been made from a mere desire to please Max, who, Alice knew, wished her to stay; or from that sweet natural courtesy which she had so often noticed in the young wife; but that same afternoon the question settled itself. Lil's horse took fright at an overladen corn-waggon while the ladies were out driving in a narrow lane, and nearly upset the brougham into a deep ditch at one side; and though no damage was done, and neither of its occupants hurt, the alarm and shaking had a bad effect on Lil, who was not very strong at the time, and confined her to her room for several weeks, during which all talk of Miss Duncan's going away came to a natural end.

Max, who had never seen his wife ill before, was dreadfully frightened and anxious, and as helpless as most men in that situation; and Alice took the burden of everything, comforting, housekeeping, and nursing, on her shoulders; devoting herself to the latter task especially with so much tenderness and efficiency that Lil's heart at times felt like to burst with the pain of keeping anything from this good angel, who seemed to have been raised up for the comfort and benefit of her life. It was impossible to maintain the old reserve when she was being watched over and tended with a cheerful, loving solicitude which Liz could scarcely have equalled, and only a mother have surpassed; and as suffering and

confinement showed up her own sweetness of temper and child-like gratitude, the two felt drawn more and more to each other; and one day in particular Lil could not refrain from lifting Alice's hand, as it lay on the pillow beside her, to her lips and murmuring:

"How good, how *very* good you are to me!" But when Alice laughed and bending down kissed her cheek with the answer: "Is it good, pray, to like taking care of my pretty little sister?" Lil shrank nervously away again, and turned her face aside, paining her gentle nurse as much as she puzzled her by the repellant action.

Another time, however, Alice had been sitting by the invalid's couch of an evening, talking of what Lil loved best to hear—the life she and Max had led as children—until the other girl had been led in return to describe that led by herself and her sisters: speaking with more and more vivacity under the influence of her listener's unaffected interest and sympathy, until some sudden recollection connected with the word she was uttering made her falter, flush up, and add abruptly:

"But all that is stupid. You will be saying, like Max, that we were a parcel of savages out there. Please go on with what you were telling me about him before."

"No, do you go on," said Alice quickly; "it is not stupid

to me. How could it be? You were speaking of the English cemetery, the 'Camp Santo', as you call it—Lil, don't you know—do you want me to *tell* you that there is no place in all the world I care more to hear about: would give more to see! I know that I never shall; that"—the patient eyes filling suddenly with tears,—"there will always be that great ocean between me and the spot where—But you know it. You have been there often; and Max says you saw *him* once. Can you—I have wanted to ask you so often—can you tell me *anything* about him—how he looked—his death—the grave where they . . ." her voice had broken altogether. Even her wonted self-command had disappeared before the overmastering rush of feeling so long and patiently kept under; and Lil was white as death, and trembling all over. She asked in a hoarse, almost rough tone:

"You want to know about—Mr. Melville. Were not you told——"

"How he died! Yes, one of his brother-officers—an old friend—wrote to dear Lady Melville, and told her; but though he said it was an accident, it seemed so confused—letters tell so little; and you were *there*. You must have heard." Alice's soft voice had grown piteous in its persistency, and Lil felt as if she could bear it no longer. She was almost beside herself with the strain.

"What should *I* hear?" she said, desperately. "His friends would be much more likely to know all about it. There are so many things of that sort taking place out there, and so *many* officers. I couldn't recollect half of them if I tried. Oh, please don't talk about *triste* things. He—he was very—nice, I dare say; but——"

But Alice had risen; not angrily; only showing how much she was wounded by her sudden paleness.

"Don't!" she said, in the low, quick tone of intense pain. "I am sorry I spoke of it. I thought—but it was a mistake. I see you did *not* know him. We will not speak of it again, Lil."

She went out of the room as she spoke, and Lil was left half-wild with remorse and self-disgust. What *had* she said? She really did not know, save that the hard, flippant tone of it jarred on her own ears; and that she had been almost hysterical with the inability to decide what to say and what to hold back. If only she could have put her arms round Alice's neck and told her all: could have put into her hands the little bunch of withered bay-leaves and English violets lying at that moment in a shabby old writing-desk at the bottom of a trunk, and belonging by every sacred right to the betrothed wife of the man from whose grave they had been taken! She even called, "Alice! Alice!" as the door

closed; but her voice was weak and uncertain, and Alice did not hear. When the sisters-in-law next met it was in the presence of others; and though Miss Duncan's manner to Lil showed no change or lessening in its usual affectionate kindness, the subject in question was not again alluded to by either; and Lil never knew what Alice had thought of her conduct.

She was well, and about again a few days after this; but her illness had left her paler and more delicate-looking; and as Max was expecting Erlscourt and some other friends from London for the shooting, he persuaded his step-sister to stay on through the autumn, and help Lil to entertain them.

He ran up to town for a couple of days in September on a visit to his gun-maker's and other tradesmen; and Lil was expecting him back one evening, and singing very contentedly to herself over her work in the library where she was sitting, when he startled her by coming into the room a couple of hours before he was expected to be due, and exclaiming:

"Where's Alice? Oh, Lil, my darling, you're there! How are you?" Then after a hasty embrace: "Look here, what's this Larkins tells me about 'Brown Butterfly' having lamed himself? I must see the vet about it at once; and I wanted Alice; I've not come down alone."

"Not alone, Max dear? Why, who is with you? Not Lord Erlscourt?"

"No, oh no; an old friend I met at the station here: a man I hadn't seen for years, and didn't recognise a bit; though I know the governor thought he was sweet on Alice once. He was actually on his way here to see us; and the best of the joke is, that he has only just come back to England, had seen the Colonel's death in the 'Times', but not our marriage, and thinks I'm a bachelor still, and that Ally is keeping house for me. I thought I'd say nothing till I enlightened him by an introduction to you."

"Fie, Max! What a schoolboy you are still, but what is his name? Alice can't see him yet, for she has gone to Hungerford, and won't be back till nearly dinner-time."

"That's a bore, for I *must* go and see 'Butterfly' this moment. Larkins says he's up at the village now with the vet. Couldn't you go into the drawing-room and explain matters to the fellow for me, Lil? Say I'll be back in ten minutes. He's a naval man, just from China, but he may know something of your parts for all I can say, and his name is Carnegie—*James Carnegie.*"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

"Friends meet to part, Love laughs at faith,
True foes once met are joined till death."—*Byron.*

"To build up a life's happiness is a work of time and labour, aided by great good fortune; to ruin and shatter it utterly is a question of a short half-hour even where no ill luck intervenes."—*G. Lawrence.*

"A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright;
But a lie which is half a truth is a harder matter to fight."
Tennyson.

"*James Carnegie!*" For a moment the room seemed to reel round with Lil, and she neither heard nor saw anything. She could not even have told how her husband left the room, or whether he said anything else first; and yet she had not fainted in the common acceptation of the word. When her senses came back to her from the giddy swirl in which she had lost them, she was still standing just where she had sprung to meet Max on his entrance, her face towards the door, and her work flung down in a little white heap on the floor, as it had dropped from her hands in the joy of seeing her husband's face.

Did anything tell her, as her glance rested on it, that she would never lift it up or go on with it again?

She *could* not realise this news so suddenly brought to her. James Carnegie—Captain Carnegie, her one bitter enemy, the man whose implacable hatred on his lost friend's account had shadowed all her life of late, and whom she had prayed never to see in this world again, *here*—a guest in her own house, waiting for her to receive him! Oh, it was too horrible, too unnatural! Providence could not mean to be so cruel as to crush her now when after so many troubles and anxieties she was just beginning to breathe freely, and look forward to a peaceful future. And yet she could not have dreamt the name! Impossible, dreadful as it seemed, it must be true; and she might be thankful that she had had even this warning, instead of being apprised of the doom before her by meeting Carnegie first, and without any preparation, in her husband's presence. Now at least she had a moment to think, to collect herself, to decide what to do, so far at least as her sick and throbbing brain would help her to decide anything.

Suppose she were to refuse to see him: to ring for her maid, and, pleading faintness or sudden illness, retire to her bed and stay there during the space of the man's visit? He could not stay long with the lady of the house ill, and when he went—— But what might he not say, what harm might he

not do before he went? Max would tell him of his marriage, and where it took place. Carnegie would learn who she was; and then. . . Oh! she could not risk it. Better far to face him, to take advantage of the brief, blessed absence of her husband and sister-in-law, and speak to him, plead with him, if need be, not to break the silence which chiefly in compliance with her promise to him she had so painfully kept. He had parted with her under the influence of strong, passionate feeling, with threats, almost execrations, excusable only under the stress of anguish for his friend's murder; but that was two years ago. He had had time to look at things in a calmer and different light: perhaps to regret his harshness to a guiltless and most unhappy girl. He might be willing to believe in and even befriend her now; and in any case the moments were slipping by. Max might return at any second, and her only safety was in speed. On the impulse of a courage born of terror and despair more than hope, she pushed open the double doors which separated the library from the drawing-room, and entered.

August that year had been even unusually hot and dry, ending in heavy thunderstorms; and, as is often the case under such circumstances, September set in with drenching rains and equinoctial gales, laying the corn flat wherever farmers had not yet got it in, scattering the lawns with torn-

off leaves and rose-petals, washing great holes in the gravel-walks, and turning the brown stubble-fields and sheltered coppices into marshy puddles. This afternoon the rain had ceased; but only for a time, as was evident by the weight of angry, ink-black clouds, drifting low overhead, and making it almost dusk at five o'clock in the pretty, flower-filled drawing-room, where Captain Carnegie was standing when Lil entered.

Had it been far darker, however, she would have had no difficulty in recognising the too well-known figure, lean and square-shouldered, with head and whiskers of angry red hair, outlined against an oblong space of dull grey window; but with him it was different; and as he turned round at the sound of her dress on the carpet, he only took in at first a general impression of a graceful, fair-haired woman in black silk coming to meet him, and stepped hastily forward with the exclamation, "Miss Duncan——" uttered in tones of the most cordial pleasure. It died on his lips, however, almost before spoken, and all further greeting was swallowed up in a stare of such blank, *shocked* incredulity, that Lil shrank from it almost as much as from the slowly-stammered words which followed.

"*You!* Lil Hardy *here!* I must be dreaming."

Lil did not speak at once. With a great effort she came a little further into the room, and dropped as if mechanically

into a seat by the fire which had been lighted out of regard for her tropical chilliness. She was shivering then as she said :

"Yes, it is I. I knew you would not expect to see me, Captain Carnegie. Did not Max tell you, however——"

"*Max!* Max Lorimer, do you mean? No; he told me nothing about you."

"But about himself, that he had been in South America since . . . since I saw you?"

"He in South America? No; I never heard of it. But—but do you mean to say that you made his acquaintance there, Miss Hardy; that you are living in England now, and have got invited here . . . *here*, to his sister's home! Good heavens! does he—does she know *who you are?*"

Lil was silent for a moment; then she looked up at him with a kind of sorrowful, pathetic dignity.

"I am his wife," she said very slowly.

There was a dead silence. The woman had not moved again or turned away her gaze, and Captain Carnegie stood in front of her, fixing her with the same fixed, incredulous stare as that which had come over his face in the first instant of recognition.

"His *wife!* You!" He said then, "I—I don't believe you. You may be jesting with me, Miss Hardy; but even you would not be capable of *that.*"

The colour rose a little in Lil's cheek. Till then no snow could have been whiter.

"No, I am not jesting," she said, with a calm of tone and manner which the trembling knees on which her clasped hands rested altogether belied. "How could I jest—with you! I am not Miss Hardy now. Max Lorimer is my husband; and for that reason I must not let you speak to me as you are doing. It would not be right to him that I should; but I will tell you—you have the right to be surprised—I will tell you how——"

"How Alice Duncan's brother was beguiled into marrying the girl through whom her betrothed husband had already been murdered! Thank you, *Mrs. Lorimer*, but I would rather not hear. I can understand the process by past experience, you know. Let me congratulate you instead—if you don't turn me out of your house for my plain speaking before I can do so; and let me assure you also that I could never pay you a greater compliment than in my wonder at seeing you here. I don't now."

"Captain Carnegie!"

"Not at you, at any rate. Nature never made conscience-stricken cowards of the Miss Hardys, as I am aware. The person I do wonder at is your husband. He was a spoilt, thoughtless lad when I knew him, but that he should have

ousted and insulted a sister so devoted to him as Miss Duncan for the woman whom he knew——"

"He did not know," said Lil quickly. "You are wronging him as much as you wrong me. He was out of England, and never even heard of her engagement to Mr. Melville till after he met me; and I—I never guessed (how could I?) that he had any connection with the friend whose terrible death, innocent as I was of it, had nearly been mine too. I only found it out after we were married, and then it was too late. Even if he knew now——"

"If!—excuse my interrupting you—do you mean then that he does not know; that he has brought you here as his wife, and made his sister sit at the same table with you in ignorance of this?"

"Yes; and, Captain Carnegie, I beg—I implore you to let them remain so," cried Lil, leaning forward and stretching out her clasped hands to her antagonist with a touching earnestness of appeal which would have moved almost any other man. "I have no ill-feeling against you. I could even *like* you, bitter and insulting as you are to me, for caring for Miss Duncan as you do. Do you think I don't care for her too; that I would not give my own life if I could to bring back Frank Melville's? It is not my fault that I cannot, or that she is in ignorance. You said it would pain her more to

know how it happened, and so I held my tongue. But oh!" —the tears breaking suddenly from her eyes in a quick rush, —"if you knew the pain it was to me to do so; to keep the secret from her and from my husband. Don't make it worse now. You are unfair to me. You do not know—and if you tell Max——"

She stopped short. The words died in her throat with a sort of gasp; and her eyes fixed themselves, not on Carnegie, but on something beyond him, with a look so awful in its dumb despairing anguish that involuntarily the officer too turned to seek for the cause, and saw, standing just within the embrasure of the library-door, Max Lorimer looking in on them.

The baize-lined door opened noiselessly, and he had come in without either being aware of it.

For a moment there was a silence among the three so intense that the light crackle of the wood-fire, the patter of rain against the glass of the window, jarred upon it with a sudden clatter of interrupting noise; and then Max came forward, his face white as death, and every feature quivering with haughty indignation, as he exclaimed:

"May I ask what is the meaning of this? Captain Carnegie, you appear to be conducting yourself very strangely. Are you at all aware that this lady is my wife?"

Captain Carnegie sneered. To a man of his temperament Max's furious tone and gaze gave him just what he wanted —fresh fuel for the gratification of his vengeance.

"So she has told me," he said coolly; "I certainly was not aware of it before; neither perhaps are you that the lady and I are old acquaintances."

"And what of that, pray?" cried Max, more hotly still. "Hush, Lil, my dear!" checking her as she was about to speak, and lifting her almost forcibly from the half-crouching position into which during her appeal to Carnegie she had unconsciously sunk. "I am asking this gentleman the question, not you, and if you please you can leave us while he answers it. What of that, Captain Carnegie?"

"Simply that it gives me the right to congratulate Miss Hardy—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Lorimer—and to express my surprise at her good fortune," said the sailor coolly. "I hope that doesn't offend you."

"Then by G—d you're mistaken. Congratulate Mrs. Lorimer on her marriage as much as you please; but to express surprise at it, and in the way you are doing, is an insult either to her or me; and one which I'll trouble you to answer for."

"With great pleasure, only that Mrs. Lorimer, as you may have heard, has just entreated me to do the reverse. Am

I to disregard her request? I begin to think it was not uncalled for."

"D—n you, Captain Carnegie!" cried Max, quite beside himself with rage, and taking a step forward as though he would have struck the other on his taunting mouth. "How dare you use my wife's name in that tone, or quote her requests to me! Leave the room, Lil——" for she had clung to his arm, and was imploring him to be calm, and to listen to her. "This is no place for you, when I am forced to forget myself."

"But, Max, I would *rather* tell you myself. I——"

"My dear, you can tell me anything when I am at leisure; but I am not speaking to you now, and I beg you to obey me. You are degrading yourself by remaining even for a moment in the same room with this man after what he has said, unless——"

"Unless Mrs. Lorimer has reason to think the degradation lies elsewhere," said Carnegie coolly. "I am not Miss Duncan's brother, but, if I were, I should feel as if it was *she* who was insulted by another presence here; and I venture to believe that if she were informed of even one chapter in the history of the fair——"

But Lil heard no further. With a gesture too imperious to be resisted, Max had led her to the door, and opened it.

The next instant it had closed behind her, and she heard the key turned sharply in the lock. She was outside.

* * * * * *

For a minute, more perhaps (she did not know), the young wife stood there, too faint and dizzy to move, or even to lift her head from the door-post, against which it had sunk. She could hear the murmur of angry voices from the room within; but the turmoil in her own brain prevented her from even trying to listen to what was said. It was quite a different sound that roused her at last: nothing more than the light laugh of a young housemaid, audible through the open door at the other end of the hall communicating with the kitchen regions; but, as it fell upon her ear, her senses seemed to come back to her, and she drew herself upright with a sudden nervous start. She had forgotten the servants —those great factors in the maintenance of outside peace and decorum in "upper ten" households, the Dracos and Lycurguses of the kitchen, who sit in judgment on their masters and mistresses, and reduce to a bitter innuendo, delivered in a courteous undertone, or an insult chastely veiled in sarcastic Gallicisms, the familiar boot and flat-iron interchanged with flow of copious Billingsgate by the unservanted coster and his spouse. Max would never forgive her if she allowed herself to be found by one of the domestics in her present position;

and, in sudden terror of the possibility of such a fact, she crept hurriedly up-stairs to her own room, and, having shut the door, dropped into the nearest chair, heedless of the damp chill in the atmosphere, of the wind rattling the wet rose-branches against the window, and of everything around her, save the one thought—when would her husband come to her!

It was in this way that Palmer found her when she came into the room some ten minutes later, and the woman exclaimed in alarm at the sight of her mistress crouched up in a low chair with her cold hands clasped against her breast, and her colourless face drooping over them; but Lil roused herself at once, and answered very calmly that she had had "bad news, which had made her feel a little faint; but it was over, and she wanted nothing, only" (with a sudden thought, which flushed her pale cheeks with colour) "to have Miss Duncan sent to her *the moment* she returned. She would rather be alone till then."

Palmer went away reluctantly, and another five or ten minutes dragged on. They might have been as many hours to Lil, she was listening so impatiently now. All her thoughts, all her hopes, had turned vividly to Alice, and towards appealing to her against James Carnegie. She would tell her everything, every detail of her brief acquaintance with Mr. Melville, and why she had not done so before; and she would

leave it to her, to the perfect rectitude, and calm, tender judgment of her sister-in-law, to forgive and exonerate her. With every fibre of her being she felt that she could trust to Alice Duncan to deal justly, and even generously, with her worst enemy; and as the desire to put her confidence in practice grew on her, her heart almost stopped beating under the strain of expectancy, and she sprang to her feet with a cry of thankfulness, when, after what seemed to her such long waiting, she heard the first sound of the carriage-wheels crashing through the wet gravel of the drive. Still another minute or two elapsed, and then Palmer appeared, bearing a cup of tea on a salver, and the message that Miss Duncan had not come back in the brougham. She sent her love instead, and had been persuaded to stay and dine with the friends she had gone to visit, and who would send her back in their own carriage at night.

Lil said nothing. She merely made a little motion with her hand, and Palmer took it as a sign of dismissal, and went away, leaving the tea at her mistress's elbow; but Lil did not touch it, only sank back again in her chair, and covered her eyes with her hand. She had nothing to hope for now, so far as any external aid was concerned; and though she tried to pray that it might not be needed, that her husband might espouse her cause as warmly in her absence

as he had done at the outset, and refuse to listen to Carnegie's accusations, her mind was too agitated to fix itself on any form of words. When at length, and without any preliminary sound, the door opened and Max entered, she was too unstrung and exhausted to move, or even to look up. Why should she? The first tone of his voice would tell her what he had heard, and decide the happiness or misery of her future life.

He was much calmer in appearance, at any rate, than when she parted with him below-stairs. He did not even speak at first, but turned back to see that the door was properly closed, crossing the room afterwards to do the same by the one leading into the dressing-room. Then he came and stood in front of his wife, who had uncovered her eyes, and was looking at him in mute suspense, and said in a clear, grating accent, as though he was trying to be cool:

"I have been obliged to hear some strange things downstairs; so strange that I fear, as your husband, I must ask you one or two questions on them. I only want 'yes' or 'no' as an answer. Either will be quite sufficient."

"What questions, Max?" But though she tried to speak bravely, her lips were trembling so much they would hardly form the words.

"I am told that Captain Carnegie was not only an ac-

quaintance, but an intimate friend, of yours and your family's in Monte San Felipe; and for three years was in the constant habit of calling at the house at all times, and spending his evenings with you. Is *that* true?"

"Yes, Max; but——"

"Thank you, that is enough. And you remembered it? You had not forgotten him? You did not imagine that I was speaking of some other person when I told you I had brought him to the house a couple of hours back?"

"I had no time," said Lil faintly. "You were in such a hurry to . . to go . . ." She had long since forgotten where, or what for.

"Ah! Was it also because you had '*no time*' that you never told me that Frank Melville, the man who was to have been my sister's husband, and of whom I have spoken to you on several occasions, was murdered in front of your own house, under your own eyes, and by another lover of yours, while in the act of fooling with you: throwing you a bouquet, or something of the sort, that you had begged him for so as to rouse the other one's jealousy?"

"Max! Max! It was not for *that*. Oh! for pity's sake don't speak to me in that tone! I know I ought to have told you before; but——"

"Silence, in Heaven's name! Do you mean to say,

then," his enforced calmness breaking down all of a sudden in a wild gust of fury, "that this foul story is *any* of it true: that it has been in your mind, a past adventure of yours to be hidden from me, and lied about all the time we have been married! Good God! it *can't* be possible. Answer me."

"It . . . . it . . . . his death . . . . Max, I want to answer you; but I can't while you speak to me in that tone. You are killing me."

"It is not killing you to ask you to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a plain question, and that is all I want. *Is* it true?"

"Yes."

She could say no more as he would not listen, and he turned away from her, and dashed his clenched fist down on the pretty writing-table near him with an oath of such bitter, despairing rage that in the depths of her own misery Lil seemed to feel her soul sickening even more for his. She got up from her seat, and trembling all over went to him, saying:

"Do listen to me, Max. Have some feeling for me. I know I have been wrong not to tell you long ago all I knew of Mr. Melville; but when you first spoke of him I did not know you well enough: and afterwards—that day at Lisbon —Oh! you must remember, it seemed so terrible: it had

nearly killed me at the time; and then to find out that it was *your* sister he was engaged to . . . I thought it would make it worse to say anything; and I was afraid—afraid lest you should misjudge me. Love, *querido*, don't do that now. I know I was wrong. I tell you so. I have known it all along, and better since I have seen Alice, and learnt how good she is; but that is all my fault. I am not guilty of his death. Max, you *must* believe me. I will tell you everything."

"I *don't* believe you," he retorted; not exactly thrusting her away as she leant towards him: but stepping back himself and looking, not at, but away from, her so as to avoid the softening effect of her tender, clinging touch, her fair, piteous face. Even the most tender-hearted of men have been hard and cruel at times. Max Lorimer was neither cruel nor hard-hearted, as young men go. He would have been unfeignedly shocked had you even hinted the contrary; but he had been too much of a spoilt child, and had known too little of real suffering, that greatest softener and enlarger of the heart, to be able to see beyond his own pain, his own injury in this matter. And indeed the misery from both, the burning sense of shame and deception, was intolerable to him at that moment; and all the more so for his real love for his wife, his pride and admiration for her. He would have

liked to kill Carnegie for opening his eyes to the way in which Lil had deceived him; but just at that moment he scarcely cared whether he killed her first for giving any man the opportunity for doing so. His words rushed out in a passionate flood, heedless of what they carried away or destroyed.

"I don't believe you. How should I when you have lied to me all this while! And you did lie to me. I don't care what words you used. I know what you implied, and meant to imply—that you scarcely knew Frank Melville save by name; or of his death but by report: that you had seen him once at a party, but took no interest in him. And all the while *this* is the truth; and more—God in heaven! a thousand times more! You will 'tell me everything,' will you? A late day to begin doing that now when you have succeeded in making yourself my wife; when you have got yourself married to me, and know that I can't *un*-marry you."

"Max, what do you mean? Of course I am your wife. You made me so. Oh! *por Dios!* don't say—don't tell me *now* that you are sorry!"

"And why not?" he retorted, still not looking at her: still lashing himself up with the remembrance of Carnegie's taunts below-stairs. "Sorry! I thought at least I was marrying a simple, pure-hearted girl; one with no previous romances or back-ground mysteries. Even when your own friends hinted

that I was imprudent, I wouldn't listen. When I was told point-blank of such incidents in your life as your slashing a man across the face with your whip for kissing you out riding, I put the story down as a foul lie, the slanderous invention of one I knew to be a false and vulgar woman. When I was disgusted with your sisters' slang and flippancy, when I heard —here in England—of your family history, I would not connect you with either. I thought of you as something separate, purer and sweeter than those among whom you had had the misfortune to grow up. I was *glad* to think that I had singled you out, and brought you away from them. And now to find that I have made myself an object for pity and laughter by doing so: that your name—*my wife's* name—has been bandied about in men's mouths as freely as that of any garrison hack at Portsmouth or Woolwich; that your shameless coquetries, your endless efforts, and those of your sisters, to entrap one man after another into proposing for you, either for the mere gratification of your heartless vanity, or in the hope of securing a good match, have been the theme for gossip and contempt wherever you went: that this man—the murderer *by your own avowal* of the poor fellow you had outraged even propriety to entrap—was received by you and your sisters in your house *after* his crime as freely as before; and that it was only because your father became afraid of

public scandal in consequence, that he sent you away from his home to the place where I found you. This man, Carnegie, who tells me in so many words that he warned Melville against you, and would have warned me if I had been there, heard that bit of your story (it pieces well with the rest) from a friend in Monte San Felipe; and you may thank the fact of your being what you are now—my wife—that I didn't tell him in return how cleverly you played the same game with me: how easily I (blind fool that I was!) was beguiled into consenting to take you out of the charge of the people you were with, by your story of the dying sister—who never was dying at all!—and afterwards, on the strength of having compromised you by doing so, into asking you to be my wife. '*Sorry!*' You ask me if I am sorry, here in my own blessed mother's room, in the house where I have forced my poor sister whose life you have blighted to be your companion! Be thankful that I am cool enough to remember even now that there is no use in being sorry; and that though I won't make myself your accomplice by allowing Alice to stop another day under the roof that shelters you, that shelter is your right—not hers; and that I can no more turn you from it than I can undo the marriage that binds you to me."

He stopped short, breathless with the passion which had carried him on so far; farther than he would ever have gone

if reason, manliness, and humanity had not been swept away for the moment by the rage and scorn which possessed him; but Lil made no protest, nor any motion to stay or interrupt him. She stood still, her hands folded on her bosom, her beautiful face white and rigid as if frozen into stone; and in sudden horror of the utter silence falling on his tempest of wrath he turned towards her, half-hoping that she would put out her hands to him, or say something; some word of pleading or extenuation—were it but the same as he had repulsed before — which might give him an opening for compassion or pardon; for lifting at any rate the death-veil which seemed to have fallen over the fair young face of their married life. But Lil did not speak; and seen through the dusk, and against the dim light of the window, her white face appeared as though set in a kind of stony impenitence.

He turned away with a half-impatient, half-despairing gesture, and left the room.

Even then she did not move, but stood there quite still.

CHAPTER V.

GONE!

"In what thou think'st thou art most wise; thou art
Grossly abused, Macrinus, and most foolish."—*Philip Massinger.*

"His honour rooted in dishonour stood."—*Tennyson.*

"Le Bonheur n'est qu'un rêve; mais la douleur est réele. Il y a quatre-vingt ans que je l'épreuve."—*Voltaire.*

IT was a surprise to Miss Duncan on returning home about eleven o'clock that night to be met in the hall by her step-brother: his usually bright, fresh-complexioned face looking so strangely pale and haggard that she greeted him with the involuntary exclamation:

"Max, is anything the matter? How is Lil?"

"She isn't very well. She has gone to bed. I am glad you are come home," he said, holding back the drawing-room door for her that she might pass in before him. "Have you had a pleasant evening?"

But the question was asked so mechanically, and evidently with so little thought of an answer, that Alice gave it none; and pulling off her gloves repeated anxiously:

"Lil not well! I am sorry; and she was looking so bright this morning. I hope she hasn't wanted me, Max? Do you know I really stayed away because I knew she was expecting you home by the 6.30 train, and I thought you two young people would be quite as happy for once without the proverbial Number Three! I'm afraid she over-excited herself, however. She *would* cut all the flowers for your dressing-room and study this morning, and sit up late last night finishing that gorgeous pincushion for your table, which I dare say you've already admired. I will go to her."

"No—don't do that," said Max quickly. Quite unconsciously on Alice's part her remarks had been almost as unpleasant to him as any that a person wishing to make him suffer could have suggested; and he fairly winced before the contrast which they presented to him between the loving, glad-eyed young wife, springing so joyously to meet him that afternoon, and the miserable woman with the pallid frozen face from whom he had turned so pitilessly a few hours back.

He had not seen her since. When the dressing-bell sounded he had dressed for dinner, and gone down-stairs as usual; but almost immediately had received a message that Mrs. Lorimer did not feel well enough to join him at the meal, and so had dined alone. He had hardly expected to do otherwise, and was chiefly concerned with

not allowing the servants to suspect that anything was amiss; but the very simplicity of the message, and something of anxiety or compassion in Palmer's face as she delivered it, gave him more uneasiness than he liked; and he betrayed the irritation and contrariety of his feelings by the imperious stress he laid on her having everything she could fancy sent up to her, even when he was told she did not want anything at all, and his question twice repeated as to whether the fire in her room had been lighted and was burning properly. Even if Lil were utterly unworthy of the position he had placed her in, he would not have those under her surmise that such was the case, or deflect by one hair's-breadth from the respect due to that position; and in the depths of his own heart he knew even then that he did not in truth believe her to be so unworthy.

She had given him cause, perhaps, for thinking so. Any one—he said it to himself with a sort of mental defiance—*any* impartial person acquainted with the external colouring of her life, as reported to him, would have concurred in that opinion, and in justifying him in holding to it; and her deviations from social proprieties in London, her independence of conduct with regard to the other sex which had so much displeased him in the camp; nay, even his own general estimate of her as a beautiful but untrained and uncultivated

Pocohontas, were all and severally corroborations of the probability of Captain Carnegie's accusations being well founded, and of his own right to endorse them.

But none the less, he was irritatedly conscious that, apart from passion, and in the after quiet of the conscience-pricks, all the more alert because unstimulated by external pressure of retaliation or reproach, he did not endorse either the picture of his young wife, as presented by this man, or his own replica of it, in the bitter tirade he had levelled at her. Still less would he have been willing to suffer any other person to endorse it; nay, would have been quick to refute such harsh judgment by that kinder explanation of certain of the circumstances alluded to which he was conscious of having supplied to his own satisfaction on previous occasions. He was not even sure that he did hold to the Pocohontas theory now as complacently as heretofore. Somehow Lil as the mistress of her own house, winning even the oldest and most prejudiced family servants by her sweet and gracious manners, interesting herself among the poor, appealed to by the vicar, and flattered by the open admiration of Sir Peter and other county magnates—Lil, with her girlish vivacities and caprice toned down by the sense of new responsibilities and the cares of wife and matronhood, was a person of more dignity, and requiring to be regarded with

more respect, than the pretty, inexperienced bride, whose greatest aptitude in London seemed to be to make mistakes, and get herself frowned at. He was finding out by degrees that it was not only her beauty which drew people to her side and kept them there. Old friends of his parents—people whom he had been taught to respect and look up to—spoke to him of what a pleasure it was to talk to his wife; her opinions were so much fresher and wider, and her mind so much clearer, than the generality of young women of her age, while her frank and ingenuous freedom from anything like constraint or affectation, gave even her innocent desire to please a special charm of its own.

"The fact is, my dear Max, you're a great deal too lucky," old Lady Petersham—a dignitary in the county—had said to him after the young couple had dined at her house. "You Lorimers are good-looking fellows enough, but you've never one of you had brains enough to make your head ache, or soul enough to trouble your digestion. You've never *done* anything in the world; and a pretty girl who dressed well, or a good housekeeper, would have been quite sufficient for you; not a delicious young creature like this, with a face like an angel, the courtesy of an old-world *marquise*, and enough spirit and enthusiasm to make her a prize for some rich philanthropist or liberal politician. I don't wonder

young Erlscourt raves about her. You're more fortunate than you deserve, Max Lorimer; and you'll have to keep yourself well up to the mark, or other people will be finding it out."

Max had laughed at this at the time as a good joke, covering a gracious and not unwelcome compliment to his wife; but the idea had crossed his mind once or twice afterwards while assisting at conversations with Lil and his sister, in which, to his great surprise, he not infrequently found himself out of his depth altogether; or on the opposite side, not to the South American girl only, but both ladies. Far from being joined, indeed, by Alice in his laughing superiority and scorn for poor Lil's foreign ways and customs, he was astonished and somewhat mortified at being told that many of these were common to the most enlightened countries in the world, and admitted by our own wisest men to be far better than those in vogue in England; that certain of the social Behemoths, whose claims to reverence Lil had so grievously shocked him by slighting, were not types of "Anglo-Saxon enlightenment" at all; but comparatively modern importations from other countries, and only abandoned by the latter for newer and better ones; that this bulwark of British dignity was a mere relic of Dutch barbarism; and that Juggernaut of Anglican propriety nothing more than the

unfortunate outcome of a miserable climate, and a national tendency to catarrh and indigestion.

This process of enlightenment was of course for the chief part Alice's; and though Max, with his spoilt-child airs and conceit, was not over pleased by it, he had so grown up in the consciousness that his step-sister was both wiser and cleverer than himself that, when he found her siding with any one and treating their opinions with attention and deference, he was not disinclined to consider that they might be worthy of something more than tolerance even from so exalted a being as young Lorimer of the Court.

It was the remembrance of this that made him feel, even while taking the discovery of Lil's past coquetries in their worst light, that he would hardly have cared for Alice to be a witness of the scene which had followed on that discovery; and it is almost needless to say that he had not the smallest intention of removing her, as he had threatened, from the contamination of his unhappy young wife's presence. Indeed, as he sat pretending to read a novel over his cigar in the library, but really feeling intensely miserable, lonely, and uncomfortable, he was revolving in his own mind whether it would not be possible to keep the whole story from her. Certainly Lil deserved some punishment. It was a horrible story, a maddening one to come to any husband's ears; and he

had been quite justified (it was curious how often he found it needful to tell himself so) in all he said to her about it; but after all she *was* his wife. She would be the mother of his children; he loved her more than any one else in the world; and as Alice thought her worthy of that love, it seemed cruel and needless to make this matter public if it could be avoided. What he hoped at first was, that Lil would come down to the library, or even send for him, and by pleading her own cause, and begging for pardon and indulgence, enable him to exercise the generosity which (now that his anger was sated by expression) he felt more capable of displaying towards her; but she neither came nor sent; and by-and-bye Max began to think it was better as it was. Doubtless she was unhappy, but it was impossible—even had she deserved it—for her unhappiness to be removed in a moment; and seeing that she was not strong, it was perhaps better that she should go to bed, and even cry herself to sleep, rather than undergo a fresh scene of excitement and agitation. He had begun to dread the latter even for himself; and when he found that there was no probability of her reappearance that night, he became the more convinced that it would be wiser for both of them to let a little space intervene between the late painful explosion and even the preliminaries of peace. They would both be calmer in the morning; and in the mean while,

there was Alice to consider as well as Carnegie, who, though got rid of from the house, was possibly staying in the village : and whom, at the present moment, he hated even more than the latter hated Lil. He was still puzzling drearily over it all, and trying to nurse his pride and indignation between whiles, when Miss Duncan came home.

"No ; I think you'd better let her alone," he said, hesitatingly. "I don't think it's anything much : a—a little over-excitement, as you say ; and if she has gone to sleep it would be a pity to rouse her."

"If she is asleep—yes, certainly," said Alice ; but she kept her clear eyes fixed on her brother, and continued standing by the table smoothing out the fingers of her gloves, and folding them up, as if she knew she had not heard the whole of the matter. Max took an undecided turn about the room, shut the door ; and coming behind her began to help her off with her mantle, while he said :

"Alice, I wonder if you would do me a big favour?"

His sister turned her head so as to look at him.

"Surely, Max," she said, in her usual quiet way, "if it is in my power, that is. What is it?"

"There has been a man here, to-day," he said, slowly. "You used to know him some years ago, when you were quite a girl, and we were all staying in Scotland—James Carnegie."

"*Captain Carnegie!*" she repeated, with quick comprehension, and a flush almost painful in its intensity. "Frank's friend! But I thought he was in China."

"He has just come back. I met him at the station, to-day, on my way down. He was coming here to find us out, and—call on you. Alice, I want you as a favour to me not to see him."

His sister had turned round completely, and was facing him. She looked as if she fancied that her ears had deceived her.

"Not *see* him! Why, Max?"

"Because he has grossly insulted both me and my wife, and I have been obliged to order him out of the house. It is not possible that he should enter it again, but he may, of course, try to see you elsewhere; and to get you to listen to him."

"About what? There is no one I wish so much to see and listen to as Captain Carnegie. The Melvilles and I have been looking forward to the hope of doing so some future day, ever since he wrote that he could not possibly come to see us at Craig-darroch before he started for China. He was our Frank's oldest friend and school-fellow. He was beside him when he died, and saw him laid in his grave. What desire can I have greater than to do this very thing you ask me to relinquish? Dear Max, you know that I love you and Lil,

that I would do anything in my power for either of you; but *this*——you ought not to ask it without the very gravest reason; and (do not be offended with me, dear) you know your reasons are not always very grave. You are apt to be hasty at times, and take offence easily."

Max felt himself chafing with an impatience he dared not manifest. Alice spoke so gravely, so earnestly, her words were so just and reasonable, that he felt it impossible to stamp about, or put her down as he might have done poor Lil's tearful pleadings and broken remonstrances. He hesitated, and then said desperately:

"I know it seems a hard thing to ask you, dear old girl, and if he had a word more to add to what you know of poor Melville's assassination that would be pleasant or comforting to you, I wouldn't be such a brute as to keep you from it; but I give you my word of honour he has not. The worst of it is, I *can't* go into the whole story of our quarrel with you. It would give you no pleasure, and it wouldn't be right or fitting. It was about Lil—not you. He had known her abroad, and they—he and her family—had had some unpleasant differences. When he saw her here he did not know that she was my wife, did not even know I was married, in fact, and he behaved to her with brutal rudeness. I came in at the moment, and of course called him to account for it.

The whole affair has upset her very much, of course; and I shouldn't wonder if she was really ill from it to-morrow; but the poor child is really fond of you. I know she wouldn't do anything to hurt you if she could help it; and so I thought that for her sake as well as mine you might consent to show this man that you are—are one with us, in fact; and ——and not listen to him if he were to try to get you on his side——or prejudice you——" he broke off (the last sentences had all been brought out with great difficulty) and repeated what he had said at the beginning. "I know it is a hard thing to ask."

Alice Duncan's quiet eyes rested on him with grave intensity. Once during the course of his embarrassed speech a sudden light had flashed into them; and the unwonted colour in her cheek had deepened in intensity and remained; but she was quite calm when she answered him:

"I am not sure that it is not *too* hard, dear Max. Remember, you are three years younger than I, and even since we last parted you have changed very much. In another three years you may change still more, and regret having exacted from me something greater (though you did not know it at the time) than you had any right to ask. Besides, if Captain Carnegie goes to the Melvilles'—as he will—whatever he says to them I shall hear as a matter of

course. Pleasant or painful, they will consider it their duty to let me know it. No, Max dear, I will not promise you to refuse to see him. Even from what you have said, I am *sure* that you are wrong both to yourself and Lil in asking me to do so; and it will be better for you that I should say 'no'; but I will promise you, now and gladly, not to listen to, or be influenced by, him in anything he may say against my brother's wife; or forget that (as you say) she is my sister, and we are one family. And now, I think we had better go to bed. To-morrow, perhaps, Lil will talk to me herself about this; but if she is unwell to-night you are right not to let her be kept awake or disturbed. Give her my love, and good-night, dear."

She put her hand on his shoulder, and kissed him with her usual quiet affectionateness as she spoke; but though Max took her advice so far as to drop the subject then, and go up-stairs with her as far as his dressing-room door, he had no intention of giving her message to Lil. Indeed, he was feeling rather more angry with his wife at present than he had done an hour before, when the incipient remorse for his cruelty to her was weighing on his mind; but that was quite wiped out now by his generosity in trying to spare her, and cover her misdeeds. The doing so had put him to a great deal of annoyance and confusion; and he was not sure even

now that, with all her gentleness and magnanimity, Alice did not think him both selfish and unreasonable. It would be very unfair, if when he, who was entirely guiltless, should be made to suffer, Lil, the guilty party, should get off scot free; so whatever tenderer promptings had stirred him a little while back, he put them angrily aside now; and saying to himself, "I shall not see her again to-night. I said I wouldn't, and it is better to keep to one's word," he fortified himself in that resolution, by turning the key sharply in the dressing-room door; and having undressed went to bed.

* * * * * *

It was about six o'clock when he woke. There was no sun, and the morning was so dull and grey that at first he thought it was earlier; but that it was not usual for him to start up uncalled and wide-awake with an almost startling clearness of faculty at that hour. *Had* he been called, however? Had Lil called him, or knocked at the door which divided him from her? He remembered perfectly that it was locked, and the recollection caused a shamed flush to rise in his cheek. Surely that was a brutal and unnecessary thing to do: and suppose she had been taken ill in the night! Suppose she had wanted him! It was all silence now. The house was so deadlily quiet he could even hear the great Chippendale clock ticking on the staircase without;

but might she not have cried out just before? *Something* had awoke him.

He sprang out of bed, and hastened to the door communicating with the bed-room, as the thought struck him. As he did so, he noticed something glittering whitely on the carpet near his foot. It was a piece of folded paper; but though he stooped mechanically and picked it up, he did not read it then; but with his other hand unlocked the door and threw it open; saying hurriedly:

"Lil! Lil, are you awake?"

There was no answer. The bed stood before him, smooth and white with its heaped-up pillows and fringed quilt; but no one had slept in it that night; and though the blinds were drawn up, and the room filled with the cold morning light, it shone on no crouching figure in the arm-chair by the fireless grate.

Lil was not there.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE BRINK.

"What shall be done for sorrow,
With love whose race is run?
Where help is none to borrow,
What shall be done?"

A. C. Swinburne.

"With modres pitee in hire brest enclosed
She goth, as she were half out of hire minde."

Chaucer.

How long Max Lorimer's young wife remained standing where her husband left her she never knew. She was not even conscious for some time that he had gone, any more than she was conscious of shame or sorrow, pain or even indignation: anything save a half-stunned sensation, a numbed stiffening of brain and nerve like that experienced by a person who has received several heavy blows on the head in quick succession; not sufficient separately to cause death, or even entire insensibility, but only to induce a temporary suspension of the mental faculties and nerve power.

If she had tried to move, to take even a step towards her angry judge, she must have fallen at his feet, just as, if he had forced an answer from her at the end, it could only have come in the form of a shriek; but he went away, and she stood on, motionless, tearless, almost feelingless, until roused by the entrance of Palmer with hot water and candles, and her terrified exclamation at the sight of the silent figure standing there in the gathering gloom. The woman apologised quickly when she saw who it was. She had thought the room was empty, that her mistress had gone down-stairs; "and what would she like to wear that evening? The dressing-bell was just going to ring."

Lil answered her with surprising calmness, though not so successfully but that Palmer felt sure something terrible must have happened to so change the usually sweet and liquid tones of her mistress's voice; but to the latter it seemed as if some one else were speaking for her, not herself; and she could almost have interrupted the brief, hoarsely-uttered reply by a laugh of hysterical scorn. "Dress!" "Go down to dinner!" Would even the maid suggest such a farce if she knew! Would Max sit down with her, if she did—Max and Captain Carnegie!—for the idea did not occur to her that the latter had left; or that Max was regarding him with a rancour and bitterness far exceeding that which

he had expressed towards herself. Her mind was not capable of thinking or even questioning as yet. It *ached*, that was all, ached so terribly that even the presence of another person in the room seemed to press on the pain, and aggravate it beyond endurance. Twice while Palmer was busying herself about the chamber, drawing down the blinds and lighting the fire, she was on the point of begging her to go away; but each time she checked herself from sheer dread of letting loose that hysterical cry, which she felt to be struggling in her throat; and only when the maid was leaving the room forced herself to say, with hands tightly clenched to aid the inward repression:

"You need not come back again. I shall not want—anything more to-night."

"Not a little plate of soup, ma'am; or some tea, at any rate? I am sure Miss Alice would say you should," said Palmer anxiously; but she could not win even a look from her usually kind and smiling mistress, and the reply was given in a lower and more unnatural voice than before:

"Not anything, but to be left. I must be left—alone. I will put myself to bed. Good night!" but the effort even for that was almost too much, and the last word came like a low sob. Palmer was too well trained not to go at once.

So the poor girl got her way and sat on alone; not

thinking even yet; rather holding herself by a resolute effort from thought of any sort; though scarcely so much from any conscious reason as from an instinctive dread of losing that merciful numbness, letting her mind revert to what had taken place and to the words which had been uttered, lest the horror and despair of them should be too much for her, and make some chance of salvation for which she was still waiting—What was it? Max's relenting or Alice's return? —come too late for her to avail herself of it.

It never came to her at all. If it only had; if only Max had acted on that remorseful prompting which kept him alternately restless, angry, and miserable through the long evening; if he had but let Alice carry out her desire of visiting her unhappy sister-in-law that night, all might yet have been well, and a whole world of irremediable woe lifted from two young creatures whose life-happiness was slipping through their fingers as the moments waxed and waned. One glance at that forlorn, drooping figure waiting with a parched agony of eye and lip beyond all tears for the step that never sounded, the word of comfort that never came, would have brought Max to his knees beside her in a gust of repentant pity; or moved Alice to take her in her compassionate arms, and, forgetting all hurt feeling of her own, to comfort the poor stricken girl with tenderest sympathy and pardon.

But they did not know. Which of us ever does know what suffering lies in our own power to inflict: what cries of anguish, unheard, unguessed at here, may ring out against us to the throne of God at this moment, and through all eternity to come! Alice went to her bed with only a half-formed guess as to something—some revelation in prospect which might be making her sister-in-law shrink from her; and which (for that very reason) she was already preparing herself to meet with no shrinking on her own side; and Max shut himself up in his dressing-room, oblivious of the cruel meaning of the act in the mere sense of escape from present disagreeables; and unconscious that with the harsh "click" of the key in the lock, something seemed to snap in his wife's heart, and loose the flood-gates of despair which, by main force, she had been holding fast so many hours.

It was all over now. She was judged and abandoned. Her husband had put her away from him. Her sister-in-law had condemned her unheard, and without even one word of pity for the miserable girl who had so unwittingly injured her. They had done with her. She was hateful to them; and nothing she could ever do or say would make her less so; reinstate her in her husband's heart; or render her sister in law capable of looking at her with anything but horror and

repulsion. Oh! if she could but die, go away out of their sight, and never trouble either of them again!

As that latter thought came into her mind she stood upright, trembling all over, and looking about her in a frightened way, as though some one had uttered it aloud. After all, was not that what she *could* do: what she was meant to do! It was impossible to stay on in this house where her own husband spoke of her presence as a contamination, and where the very servants might come to find out that she was despised. Had he not said plainly indeed that Alice must go if she stayed? But why should not Alice stay, and she go? It was she who had sinned—so he said at least: and her mind was not strong enough at present to distinguish justice from injustice, truth from exaggeration. It was characteristic of her indeed, of her natural simplicity, and of the deep-lying humility which gave her occasional flashes of spirit a kind of piquant charm, that through all this tissue of painful thought and feeling, two sources of comfort which might have aided most people in a similar strait were closed to her. No lofty indignation or vindictive feeling against her husband and Captain Carnegie for their joint cruelty to her shook the heavy weight of grief from her crushed heart for a moment; nor did it ever occur to her that the former, at any rate, was actuated more by passion and wounded pride than by any real

dislike or contempt for her; that the words of an angry man are but as so much froth or flame: a paper fire, burning away the more quickly for its own fierceness, and leaving nothing behind but a pinch of cold ashes which a breath can dissipate.

But to be indignant or even shocked at a wrong, however cruel and unwarranted, there must be some element of surprise in it; and even in the first moment of hearing Carnegie's name, Lil had somehow felt that his coming was the event she had been expecting all along. What followed was but the natural sequence, the breaking of the thunder-cloud which had been hanging overhead from the day she first found out that Max and Frank Melville had been acquainted; and had been tempted to that involuntary concealment which had brought about all the rest.

She had known it was wrong. Perhaps her natural truthfulness made her exaggerate the wrong, just as her undying sorrow for having been in any way the cause of the young officer's death, caused her to exaggerate her own guilt therein; but it never occurred to her to suspect her husband of equal exaggeration. Had she not always foreseen how it would be? A man so particular about trifles was not likely to be less so in matters affecting life and honour; and as to Captain Carnegie—why should she expect *him* to feel tender or pitiful

with regard to her? He was faithful to his friend at all events, and to the *venganza* which, to her half Spanish rearing, seemed a natural enough thing. He had only done what he had threatened her to do, if she ever thrust herself in again among those in whom he was interested; and said of her what he had previously said to her face. If a man honestly believes certain others to be treacherous and worthless, he is at least justifiable in warning his friends against them; and it was Max Lorimer and Alice Duncan who were his friends; not she, the interloper, who had intruded herself between them. She could not even assert she was not worthless! Surely it was true that she *had* flirted, had tried to mortify Pedro Sanchez; and, in disobeying her father, had thrown herself upon Max's protection. She had not thought any of these things wrong at the time; but that might be owing to her own levity and the indulgence of those about her; and even her father, who was seldom angry, and never got into a passion or said what he didn't mean, he had blamed her: even in Mr. Beauchamp's fussy anxiety and Miss Carmelita's anxious kindness had lurked a tacit reprobation. If they—her own people—had thought her wrong or imprudent, it was natural that one as punctilious even to straws as Max should view her conduct in a still blacker light: natural that she, who had been too dull—poor fool!—

to dream that his marriage with her had been brought about by anything but love and desire on his part, should be too dull also to reckon the extent of her own vileness. Surely it was enough that he thought her vile; and what mattered it even if the rest of the world thought otherwise! *He* was her world. She had put her whole life's happiness in his hand; and if he chose to snap it between his fingers and throw it away, no other could mend it, or restore it to her.

Better to let it go; to go away herself out of his sight and his memory, and make atonement so. Perhaps he would forgive her then. Perhaps even Carnegie would not care to blacken her memory further, when he learnt how she had been punished. "*My mother's room.*" . . "*I can no more turn you from it, than I can undo the marriage that binds me to you.*" These were the words which rang loudest in her brain; and something within her seemed to answer:

"But you can turn *yourself* from it. You can undo it. You can set him free. Why don't you?"

"I will. I am going. I will go now," she said; and then, all of a sudden, she began to sob and cry; not aloud, but with a pitiful helpless weeping like a child who finds itself suddenly far from home, and knows not where to turn. Poor Lil! poor, foolish Lil, who had thought she would be so happy here in her English home, that she was more fitted

to be an Englishwoman than a South American; and who now was being driven forth with scorn and indignation; a second Eve, but with no Adam to sustain and comfort her (it was Adam now who carried the fiery sword, and bade her leave his Paradise), to wander where she might, unless indeed ——*How calm and still the river looked!*

She had drawn up the blind; and in that faint obscurity which was neither night nor morning, for her long mental agony had carried her on into the small hours, and it was about three o'clock, the black and silent stream at the bottom of the lawn seemed to beckon her with a subtle suggestion of peace and rest: rest from all this torture of loss and shame and degradation, which was gradually unhinging her mind. But there would be shame and degradation for Max if she was selfish enough to seek that rest there on his own property, under his window, so that unkind people might say that he had driven her to it. She must go further off, a long way, to some quiet spot among the willows and marshes, where people would not think of looking for her; and she must write to him first, and let him know that she was gone (though not where), and that he would not be troubled with her any more. It took her a long time writing that letter, because it made her cry so terribly to do so; and she had to push it aside more than once, and lay her head on the table so that the

tears might flow unchecked ; and then she kissed it, and put it under the door, which she knew was locked against her, (a'as ! had she not heard him do it ?) and opening her little desk took out that tiny bunch of withered leaves and flowers, and wrote on a piece of paper :

" These came from Mr. Melville's grave. I brought them " away that I might never be tempted to forget (however happy " I might be in after days) the unhappiness that had once come " from not thinking. But they belong to you rightly, because " *you* are the woman he loved ; and if I had known who she " was from the first I should have liked to take them to her, " and tell her all about it, and beg her to forgive me. I did " not find out until after I was Max's wife. That was why I " could not tell you. I kept thinking that some day I might " be able to do so, and that you would understand and forgive. " Only I could not let you love me till then—And now it is " too late. They have told it you in their way, and you will " think that is the truth, and will always hate me. But you " will like to have the flowers ; and please take care of Max, " and do not blame him. *He* never knew."

She made up the little note and the brown and withered nosegay into a parcel, and wrote Alice's name on it ; and then she opened the wardrobe, and taking out the first hat and cloak she saw, began tying them on hurriedly ; but in doing

so her glance had fallen on the desk again, and something—some tender remembrance of the happy girlish days when it used to stand on the shabby chest of drawers in her bed-room at home—made her catch it up and tuck it under her arm. She *could* not leave it behind with all Liz and Loo's letters and the other treasured relics ("Lil's rubbish," as Max had once called them) of her bygone life; and she must be going at present: she must make haste. It was almost four o'clock by now. The faint, ghostly light had cleared and spread till lawn and trees and water were gradually assuming something like the spectral tints of their real selves. It would not do to delay: to run the risk of being seen by any early labourer or domestic; and though the park-gates were locked, and the keys under the safe guardianship of the lodge-keepers, there was a little rustic gate opening out of the plantations into the water-meadows, the key of which always hung on a nail in her own room; and by gliding softly down-stairs, and unfastening the glass door of the conservatory she could make her exit without disturbing anybody.

She was not crying now. Her whole mind was occupied with the need of making haste, the fear of delaying till it was too late, and till Max would get up and find her there—there where she was no longer wanted; yet when she had achieved what she desired, and stood on the other side of the little

gate, looking back at the stately, dignified house with its rows of windows, shuttered and blinded now, all save *one*, and remembered how she had stood at that one scarce two months back, and gazing out at the sunny lawn, the gay little river and clustering roses, thought what a proud and happy life hers was going to be, something like a sob rose in her throat against the cruel fate which had thus driven her forth, broken-hearted and disgraced, with no hand to help, no heart to pity her; and clasping her hands tightly over her breast with a low, wild cry, she turned abruptly away, and almost ran through the thick, dewy grass, and along the meadow towards the towing-path.

It was wet walking; for the late rains were not only still weighting with moisture every blade and leaf, so that her feet and the skirts of her dress and cloak were soon heavy and draggled with water; but the path itself had been converted into a sticky paste of wet clay alternated with pools of water; and the air felt so raw and sharp as to make her shiver, and wrap herself more closely in her cloak as she hurried along. Would the water be as cold? But after all it would only be so for a moment: one plunge and then—*the rest!* no coming up, no struggling, no dead face floating on the surface to haunt other people as that dead face in the street long ago had haunted her. She would take care of

that. A few heavy stones in her pocket, a deep pool, and her feet tied: nothing would be easier. Loo had laughed once at the stupidity of suicides generally; but she would manage it so cleverly that neither Loo—nor any one but *he*—should ever guess it was a suicide at all. She hurried on quicker and quicker. Any one looking at her, at her pale face, her bright, tearless eyes, and resolute pace, would have thought she was simply hurrying on some errand of business or mercy: would never have guessed at the muddled, desperate thoughts in that poor wrecked brain of hers. The light was getting clearer; but she did not know it; for a kind of mist was before her gaze, through which she only saw the river winding on and on like a grey and ruffled ribbon between dripping pollards and dark marsh-weeds and grasses. —Stay! what were those though? those two figures hurrying on like herself, but on the further side, and turning a little every now and then with waving hands as if to beckon her on? Surely they could not be her sisters—Liz and Loo, and *here!* And yet they were no one else. She could see their shapes, grey and shadowy through the mist, and the colour of their dresses—the same dresses they had on when they last parted, Louie's fluttering curls, and—*what was that?* that bundle, that Liz carried in her arms?

She hurried on faster.

The figures in front hurried too. It was as if they knew what she was looking for: as if they had seen the place, and were leading the way to it. But why did not they stop for her? Why did they only shake their heads and beckon when she tried to call to them; and why did her voice seem to perish in her throat and make no sound? Perhaps they were dead too, and these were their ghosts. Ah! well, so much the better, she should go to them all the sooner; and for her the water was the only way. Had she not gone far enough yet?

She had come at last to a bend in the river where there was a deep pool overshadowed by a clump of willows. There was no house near or in sight; not a human being, or a moving creature: nothing all around but tall reeds, and pollards, and wet, dank meadows; and instinctively she stopped, and laying down her box began tightening the knots of her hat and cloak so that they should not be washed off her, and looking about for stones to weight her pockets with. The shadowy figures on the other side stopped too. They were still waving their arms; but she would not look at them; for now they seemed rather to be warning her back; and she did not want to go back. Why should she? She felt sure this was the right place, and there were stones enough . . . .

But when she had finished her few preparations, and stood

on the edge of the dark, deep water, she lifted her eyes and looked across. She could see her sisters still; but they were not standing on the bank now; but raised above it as though about to fly across to her. She flung the little desk into the river before her, and stretched out her hands to meet them, as she took a step forward; but in the same moment something seemed to thrust her back; and through the spray caused by the falling box she saw Loo uncover the tiny burden she carried, and hold it towards her . . . . She had not seen what it was before; but *now* . . . . .

The next moment the desolate fields rang with a woman's cry, sharp and wild; and Lil was on her knees holding for support to the drooping bough of a willow-tree which overhung that ghastly pool, and sobbing out:

"Oh God, forgive me! God help and deliver me! I had forgotten—I never meant . . . . *to kill it!* Max! Max! Max! how could you! How *could* you! . . . . The mother of your child!"

* * * * * *

It was at that moment that Max awoke. Had he heard?

* * * * * *

"'*Gone?*' 'Driven away,' and by you! Lil? Max, what do you mean? Do, do, my dear brother, be calm, and tell me. I saw you were keeping something back last night,

but *this*—Oh! if I had only gone to her then! Where is she " Woke out of a sound sleep which had succeeded to an agitated night, by an eager, peremptory whisper from her brother, Alice Duncan had only waited to put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and had followed him to her sister-in-law's room, fearing nothing worse than that the latter had been taken ill in the night; but the sight of the empty bed startled her at the first glance; and as she turned to meet her brother's ghastly face, he covered it with his hands and dropped into a chair, sobbing like a child as he exclaimed:

"She is gone! I have been all over the house .... the conservatory door .... open .... it was all my fault. I drove her away, I ...." He could not finish, and only when Alice, frightened out of all her usual serenity by this passionate break down in the complacent and self-contented young man, lifted his head in both her hands, and implored him to be calm and tell her where Lil was, he answered with almost savage bitterness:

"Where? At the bottom of the river there, for aught I know; and if so, it is I, and my brutal cruelty, that have put her there. I would not go to her. I locked her out. I told her I did not want her. I .... there! take her letter, and see for yourself;" and again his head went down on his clasped hands in a passion of such almost boyish despair that

Alice could hardly read the little blotted scribble held out to her for the compassionate tears which fell from her own eyes upon it. This was what it said:

"I am writing this to tell you that when you read it I "shall be gone, never to see or trouble you any more. You "will not need to be shamed by me again, nor to send Alice "away; though indeed if I had been as bad as you say, she is "too good to be harmed by me. And I never meant to be "bad, or to harm her, or any one. I did not even guess you "had those thoughts in your mind about me. I loved you, "and I thought you loved me too. Have you forgotten that "dreadful cholera time, and how you begged and urged me? "and I wanted to wait .... But now you say it was not so; "that I deceived you, and *made* you marry me; that you would "turn me away if you could. Dear, you did not need to say "that, or to lock the door. If you can think me what you "say, I ought to go. God will forgive me if I am wrong, for "He knows all about it. He knows I never meant to be so; "and when I see Him .... You have left me no other refuge: "so now you know that you are free again, and that I shall "not come back to vex you; only some day ask Alice to for- "give me, and tell her I would have given my own life to "save *his*. I am giving it now to make amends. Good-bye.

"LIL."

The paper fell from Alice Duncan's hands, and she looked up quickly: eyes and voice suddenly stern.

"What does this mean, Max?" she asked. "What use

has been made of my name that Lil writes to you in this way? *She* harm me, poor child! She would not harm a fly. And you have driven her away! You *must* tell me what it means."

But indeed Max needed no urging. Just as when a child, after hectoring and bullying and setting at defiance all remonstrances and warnings from those in authority over him, he had suddenly given in, and, flinging his arms round Alice's neck, declared he "*would* be good", and implored her to save him from the consequences of his naughtiness; so now he poured out the whole story, Carnegie's sneers and accusations, his own wrath and mortification vented on Lil the more violently for the restraint he had been compelled to put on them below-stairs; his refusal to hear her in her own defence; the very taunts and threats he had used: all was poured out; not only without holding back or evasion, but without even space for thought as to the effect on his hearer, whose flickering colour and dilating eye, as well as the quick, shuddering sob, bore witness stronger than words; to the emotions roused in her by these abrupt revelations as to the details of her lover's death. But Miss Duncan had had a training in self-control and abnegation whereof her step-brother did not even dream; and whatever her own feelings, she never interrupted the painful story by a syllable; and

long before the end, had put her share in the sorrow out of sight in sheer pity for that of another.

"Poor Lil! Poor—poor child!" was all she said at the end, and Max looked up at her wonderingly.

"You—you can think of *her* first! You don't feel bitterly against her?" he exclaimed.

"Bitterly against her! Poor child!—what she must have suffered! And if I had only known it sooner: only guessed why she shrank from me! Why do you look so at me, Max? Are you wondering that this does not take me more by surprise? But you forget what you said last night about Lil and Captain Carnegie, and when I came to put it together with bits from Frank's last letters to me, I almost seemed to see——No, not all that you have told me—I do not see that yet. I do not yet believe your wife was to blame——"

"You don't? Oh, Alice, God bless you! I thought you would never have borne to look at her again."

"If you will find her and bring her back to me, you will see how I will look at her. Max, you are excited now, and there is no time for talking; but believe you are under some horrible, cruel mistake as to all this. Captain Carnegie is a good man, but he is a very prejudiced one; and he was prejudiced against Lil before ever you knew her. I know that

from Frank's own word; and I know, too, that she was not the only girl to whom he was pledged for Carnival play that day. Ah! you look surprised; but you forget how often my dear love wrote to me; that his last long letter was written only the day before his death. Let that rest for the present. It is Lil only we have to think of now. When did you find that she was gone?"

"Not half an hour ago; and I tracked her footsteps for some yards from the conservatory door towards——"

"Dear Max, don't—don't give way. Not——"

"God help me, yes, towards the river!"

For a moment Alice's face blanched to the whiteness of her brother's; then she darted to the nail where the key had hung, and broke into an almost hysterical laugh.

"Not towards—*across* it. She has taken the key of the plantation-gate, the one we always went through on our way to Hungerford by the water-meadows. Max, think! When is the first up-train from there?"

"Not till 8.40."

"And it is not half-past six as yet. You will have lots of time, even though you keep by the—the river all the way. You may very likely overtake her. It is only three miles, and she will not walk fast. She will not think of our missing her so soon. Only make haste, and slip out quietly, that

the servants may not see you. Fortunately they don't seem to be about as yet."

It was Alice who thought of everything and managed everything. As for Max, he was so utterly unnerved by the discovery of his wife's flight, that he could think of nothing but her, and even his strongest motive power under ordinary circumstances, the fear of appearances, seemed to have no existence for him. It was as if some subtle, new-born sympathy had been suddenly established between him and his young wife. He could see nothing but Lil's face, white and fixed as he had last looked upon it, but staring out at him in mute, eternal reproach, through a ripple of sliding water; or a grey and ruffled river rolling through a wide, willow-sprinkled marsh, along which one frail, solitary figure wandered vaguely. Even when Alice spoke to him, reminding him of this or that, and giving him directions as to stations and telegrams, it was Lil's voice he seemed to hear saying in the words of her letter: "I shall not come back to vex you." Yet, with all the urgent need for haste and decision was strong enough within him to hasten with his brief preparations. He was ready in little more than five minutes, and as he left the room, Alice met him, and, laying her fingers on her lip for silence, accompanied him down-stairs.

"Listen, Max," she said when they were in the conserva-

tory; "if—if you should miss Lil on the way, you will want to know how she was dressed. Well, I have been looking in her wardrobe and drawers, and I think I know. Her grey waterproof cloak, and black hat, the one with the long feather, are gone, and the dress she had on yesterday, the dark green merino; and she has taken her little desk, the one she called her treasure-box, but not her trinkets or anything else. There, now you can go; and oh! keep up your heart, be brave. I shall say to the servants or any one that asks, that you and Lil have had to go up to town on important business by the early train, but that you will be back soon. And you will—I know you will, dear. God grant it, at any rate, and bless you."

She parted with him so at the glass door whence poor Lil had made her exit more than two hours previously; but her own heart was heavy within her with a fear she would not utter, and if it had not been for all she had yet to do and think of—her own hurried dressing, the disarranging Lil's bed and room, so as to look as if they had been slept in, the information to be given to the wondering, startled servants; more than all, the necessity for preserving perfect calm and serenity in her own appearance—she could have sat down and cried like a child over the reopening of her own life-wound, as well as the shattering of these young lives around

her. Yet though some tears *would* fall when, in the course of her arrangements, she discovered that tiny parcel Lil had addressed to her, they were not for herself at all, and scarcely so much for the lover, so well-loved and early lost, as for the young girl whose share in his fate had been paid for with so heavy a penalty; and after a minute her eyes were resolutely dried, and with a silent prayer for strength and guidance, she went quietly down-stairs, prepared to go through the ghastly formality of the usual nine o'clock breakfast as if nothing had happened.

Almost at the same moment, however, her eye was caught by the figure of a small boy, with a yellow envelope in his hand, coming up the gravel-walk; and forgetting everything —even the presence of the solemn man-servant—she sprang up and flew to the door to meet him.

It was a telegram from Max and ran thus:

"*Hungerford Station.*

"No trace or sign of her either by the river or here. Shall go up to Paddington and watch arrivals till mid-day on the chance. Take the towing-path yourself *the other way*, and telegraph news to Paddington."

Alice crumpled up the paper in her hand, and went back to the table. It was the first disappointment, and her knees were shaking, and her lips very pale. What was the news that she might have to send!

CHAPTER VII.

THE END OF THE SEARCH.

"You have killed a sweet lady, and her
Death shall fall heavy on you . . . .
. . . . . .
What we have we prize not to the worth
While we enjoy it; but, being lacked and lost,
Why, then we rack the value; then we find
The virtue that possession would not show us
Whiles it was ours . . . . . .
. . . . . Then shall he mourn,
And wish he had not so accused her,
No, though he thought his accusation true."

'Much Ado About Nothing.'

IT was a wise idea of Miss Duncan's to send her brother along the towing-path to Hungerford, which, being three miles off, was a safer station for Lil to start from than that just outside the park-gates; and had she, after the thwarting of her first purpose, continued her route in the same direction, it must certainly have resulted in her being overtaken before the time for the train to start.

In the revulsion of feeling, however, arising from the shock of recovered consciousness, and the sense of an escaped

crime—a horror barely averted—the mere sight of the river, of the leaden, sullen water, the grey sky turning to red upon the east, the spectral willows, whose twisted arms and fluttering leaves seemed beckoning and waving her back, the yellow loosestrife and purple-feathered reeds nodding mockingly at her—all had a subtle horror, a terrible fascination, from which she turned and fled as from some frightful and yet tempting fiend.

Out from those waving reeds and willows, away from those dank, dreary meadows, where the very pools and puddles seemed, under that deepening stain in the sky, to wear a bloody tinge, she must go, aye, and go quickly, if the wild death-promptings of her broken, outraged spirit were to be silenced by that faint, quivering appeal within her bosom; and on the saving, God-sent impulse, which had already dragged her back from the brink of death, she almost ran, not only till she got into the high road, but for some distance along it, until the artificial strength of excitement suddenly failed her, and she was obliged to stop and lean on a gate by the wayside to rest. There was a sound of wheels behind her at the moment, and in another minute a gig came up, driven by a red-faced, cheery-looking farmer, who checked his horse to give a curious look at the pale, fragile-looking woman, whose appearance sufficiently betokened her unfitness

to be out at such an hour, and in the rain, which was now again falling.

"Hi, missus!" he called out, "you an' I be out betimes, an' in bad weather. Be 'st ill, eh?"

Lil looked up nervously. By this time, and in the interest she took in the peasantry about her new home, she knew most of the Troutbury folks by sight, and it was a relief to her to see that this man was a stranger.

"No," she said, trying to speak collectedly, "I am not ill, thank you, only tired."

"An' looks it, so looks are none such liars as folks say. Where art bound? I'll gie ye a lift an' welcome, so's our road's the same."

"To Hungerford, to catch the train there," said Lil. With her change of purpose, and her perception of something in life yet left to live for, had come the first rush of anger against him who had made life worthless to her, and coupled with it a great dread of being followed or brought back by him. She had not thought at all of what she was going to do, but the influence of that strange vision of her sisters was still upon her. They had saved her a moment back. They would save and care for her still if she could but get to them. She would go *home*, and London was the first stage thither. The thought decided her answer.

"To Hoongerford, eh?" said the farmer humorously. "Well, this is the high road, zure enough; but, if thou'rt goin' there, thou'rt travellin' back'ards. Hoongerford's a moile in that direction, yoong missus, an' thy face be turned to Troutbury. Whoa, there! Doan't look so skeart. Hast come far?"

"Oh, yes! a—a long way," said Lil faintly. "I have to catch the first train to—Reading." She knew Reading was on the road to London, and dared not be more explicit, though the idea that she had actually been walking back to the Court had nearly taken away her breath. Fortunately, the farmer misunderstood her agitation.

"Never mind," he said kindly. "I could drop thee at Troutbury for that matter, but I'll do thee a better turn still. I'm boun' to Newbury mysel', which is two stations nigher Reading, an' starts an earlier train, so coom along with me, an' I'll drive thee all the way. We'll just make out to do 't in time if we brisk along."

"Oh! how good of you! *Gracias mu*—thank you so much," said Lil fervently; but, indeed, the unexpected kindness, combined with the reaction from over-fatigue and excitement, was almost too much for her. The tears were running down her white cheeks even as she climbed into the seat beside her new friend, and though she tried to hide

them, the effort was not successful; and by-and-bye he drew a big brandy-flask out of his pocket, and handed it to her, saying:

"Coom, missus, what's amiss wi' thee? Got a sick husband or friend at Reading that thou'rt goin' to? Nay, cheer up then," as he took the droop of her head for assent, "an' take a sup o' this. Maybe a 'll be better by th' time thou'st there. Hast had breakfast?"

Lil shook her head. Speech was impossible. It was all she could do now to keep from fainting.

"Then eat these, mum," producing a couple of large biscuits from another pocket; "an' take a good swig o' the brandy. Tchah! woman, dunna be feert o' it. 'Twill only bring back the blood to thy poor face! an' take my word for 't, ye'll be no use to sick folks, nor get to thy journey's end neither, an' thee don't take keer o' thyself."

Lil gave a quick start, and looked up at him.

"Thank you," she said, as she obeyed. "I—I dare say you are right. Yes, give me some more of the brandy. I—I am not afraid of it. I *must* get to my journey's end."

Her pallor had passed away. A feverish brightness had come into her eyes, and a curious hard look to her mouth. She shed no more tears, but drew her cloak closer round her, and by-and-bye she took out of her pocket a purse,

which she had taken out of her desk and put there with the stones to weight it, and counted the money it contained. There were three sovereigns in gold, a £10 note, which Max had given her just before starting for London, and some loose silver and coppers. "Plenty to take me to Southampton, and keep me there till the steamer goes," she thought, "and then I have my watch and chain, and the diamond keeper to my wedding-ring; I know that cost £50. Oh! I shall surely have enough. I need never trouble him any more."

So when she parted, with most grateful thanks, from her kind protector at Newbury, she looked quite a different woman from the wan, exhausted creature he had picked up by the roadside, and even after she was in the railway-carriage her eyes kept their curious brightness, and her cheeks a hot red colour, as she murmured over and over again:

"I *must* do it. I must get to my journey's end."

But the train left Newbury at 7.45, a whole hour earlier than that by which Max started from Hungerford, after his vain search along the river's bank; and in this way Lil got the start of him, and had reached London and left it again while he was still watching the trains at Paddington.

It is time now to return to Alice Duncan, who, God knows, had enough to occupy her during that terrible day.

Quite early in the morning a note had been brought to her from Captain Carnegie, telling her that he had come to Troutbury to see her; but that, being prevented by a difference with her step-brother from calling on her, he was now waiting at the village inn until he knew whether she would permit him, as an old friend, to see her outside the Court precincts. Miss Duncan read the note slowly, and with some hesitation; but, after a minute or two, she sat down and wrote a couple of lines in answer, telling the footman afterwards:

"If Captain Carnegie should call here about three o'clock, show him into the library. I shall not be at home in the morning. I am going for a walk."

A walk with as ghastly a purpose as perhaps any gentlewoman of Alice Duncan's stamp ever took; but which had to be gone through none the less! Max had searched the river Hungerford way. She must take the up-path, one less likely for Lil to have chosen because passing through the village in the first place, and more frequented, but which she started on with the less fear of discovering what she dreaded in the course of it, and pursued steadily, following the course of the stream with anxious, wary gaze, and so many stoppages at each swift bend or deeper nook, that those who saw her must have wondered what the young lady from the

Court could find to interest her so deeply in that dull, sluggish stream, speckled with drizzling rain, and scarcely affording a pleasant excursion-ground even to the swift-diving dab-chicks, and dirty, yellow-billed ducks with ruffled plumage, who, on such a dismal day, alone patronised it. But Alice cared little who saw her. Her one comfort was in *not* finding what, with such sickening dread, she sought; and she would have stayed out still longer but for the fear of *what* news might have reached the Court in her absence. As it was, she found another telegram from Max waiting for her on her return; and opening it hurriedly read—

Paddington, 1.50.

"Have waited here till now. No sign. One porter, however, remembers a tall young woman in grey cloak and black hat by first train from Newbury. Noticed her because only two other female passengers. Shall go to Almond's Hotel and lodgings. Hold yourself ready to join me."

This gave a gleam of hope, and to encourage it more than anything else, Alice busied herself in packing a couple of travelling-bags with things her brother and sister-in-law might need, in case, even if Lil were found, she should not wish to return home for a day or two. But after that there was nothing to do but wait; and it was almost a relief when precisely at three, Captain Carnegie was shown into the library where she

was sitting. The sailor's greeting was eager and deferential, and his complexion was not one to show changes of colour; but there was certainly a perceptible embarrassment under his cordiality; and though Alice rose at once and gave him her hand, her grave and troubled countenance did not tend to lessen it. She said with her usual directness:

"It was kind of you to come and see me, Captain Carnegie, and there is nothing to which I have more looked forward in the last two years than your doing so. I wish I could welcome you more heartily now; but there is great sorrow in this house to-day, and as you brought it here I need not excuse myself to you for feeling it."

"Surely," he said stammering, and evidently astonished by her tone, "I brought no sorrow to *you!* I found out indeed that you had been grossly deceived——"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Carnegie," said Alice with quiet dignity; "I do not like to contradict you, but you are mistaken. I had been no such thing."

"I mean, my dear Miss Duncan, that you had been kept in ignorance of *who* the young lady—your sister-in-law now unfortunately—was; and of her connection with—with——' he stopped short, and added abruptly: "I don't like to pain you."

"You cannot help it," said Alice calmly. "You mean her

connection with the death of him who was the link between you and me—our best friend. But surely it was you yourself who kept me in ignorance of the same!"

"Yes, certainly, because I thought it would only aggravate the shock at first, and perhaps make you think badly of him; that he had been flirting,"—then seeing a sudden warning flash in Alice's eyes, so calm and gentle usually,—"I did it to spare your feelings at any rate," he added deprecatingly. Miss Duncan, however, was not soothed.

"I am sorry you could think me capable of any thought so degrading to myself and him," she said coldly; "but even so, what right had you to discredit my sister-in-law with the same kind intentions as yourself?"

"What right? The right of everything I know of her; and I have known her and hers long enough. Miss Duncan, excuse me, I did not expect this reception from you. Surely if (as your note told me) you know all, you cannot look on this young lady as a *friend!*"

"I look on her, Captain Carnegie," said Alice, with a simple dignity all her own, "as far more than a friend: as my brother's wife, and my own dear sister; and if I loved her before I knew this that you have come to tell me, I love her infinitely more now that I know—as I do know—that she was one of those who showed kindness and hospitality to my

poor Frank in a foreign country; and grieved with me over his loss."

Captain Carnegie looked equally angry and bewildered.

"I don't understand you," he said sharply. "Of course if she has made you believe——"

"She has made me believe nothing. She has not spoken to me. You deal your blows too heavily, Captain Carnegie," said Alice, hot indignant tears rising in her lovely eyes; "and God only knows whether she will ever speak to any of us—any one—again! What I say to you I say on Frank's authority, and from Frank's lips. You are a hasty man, and he was a cool one; but he loved you as warmly as you loved him, and therefore you will not be angry if I show you what he said in his last letters, the last words he ever wrote."

She laid a couple of letters on the table before her visitor, and pointing to certain marked passages, sat down again, and leant her head on her hand, waiting.

The paragraphs indicated ran thus—

"I haven't seen very much as yet of the society here; of the Spanish side of it nothing at all; but the English moiety strikes me as very genial and pleasant, and not at all unlike that in the States. There is the same open-hearted hospitality to strangers, regulated only by your own merits, and not by who or *what* you are; the same frank intermingling and freedom

of intercourse between men and women ; and, by consequence, the same charm of innocent outspokenness and friendly, unaffected ease among the girls which only fools or libertines could misunderstand, and which indeed seems to be generally recognised by answering frankness and chivalry on the part of their male acquaintances. It is a pity the system doesn't hold here, for under it real hearty friendships between young men and women seem as possible as between men and men here, and as common. Of course they flirt too (as where don't they?), but even the flirtations are so unsentimentally open and light-hearted that I should think they were extremely innocuous ; and I am driven to the humiliating conclusion that it is only the preponderance of men over women in this country which makes our worship of so much importance to the latter. Anyhow it is a fact that out here a poor bachelor can actually find himself at home day after day in a house full of girls, walk with them in the afternoons, and sit with them in the evenings, without exciting any feminine heart-burnings, or having to fear a breach of promise case and questions as to 'intentions,' &c."

Captain Carnegie paused for an instant; but there was another marked passage on the next page, and he went on :

"Then, besides the Consul's family, I have just made the

acquaintance of another, where there is no hospitable mother but a prim little male parent, generally invisible, and three girls, capital types of the class I have described to you; pretty and winning enough with their semi-Spanish grace and courtesies to turn any one's head not otherwise occupied; but with so much matter-of-fact directness and simple, independent dignity, that he would be an idiot who presumed on their kindness as a sign of any special favour to himself. Like the Beauchamps, they received me with the greatest cordiality on Carnegie's introduction, and showed me as much genial kindness as if I had been an old acquaintance; one of the girls (something like you, by the way) even giving up a waltz in the evening to talk to me about home and England, when she found that my lame shoulder prevented me from having a share in the dancing."

There was nothing more marked in that letter; but the other was folded down at—

"This is the first day of Carnival, but as it is also the last for the mail, I would rather spend it in writing to you, Alice darling, than in any other earthly occupation which would not have you to share it. To-morrow, however, I shall go ashore with Carnegie and three other fellows, and have a turn at the fun. Water and eggs are the chief missiles thrown, but it is also the correct thing for our meeker sex

to interlard these with flowers and scent; and as I have promised no less than ten young female beings (think of that for a canny Scot!) to remember my duties in that respect, and have had to lay in flowers for all of them—the Consul's four girls, ranging in age from nine to twenty-nine, three dear little maids all under seven, the children of a pleasant couple I was taken to call on yesterday, and the two grown and one un-grown girl I told you of in my last; you may think of me as sallying out to the fray like a perambulating florist, and returning like a drowned rat, if indeed there's anything left of us to return! I will tell you all about it in my next."

There was only one more marked paragraph; but Carnegie started perceptibly, and flushed even through his natural floridness when he came to it.

"I haven't said much as yet about poor old James; but the fact is, I find him sadly altered: just as warm-hearted and jolly with regard to me and mine as ever, but grown so bitter and censorious about almost all and every one else with whom he comes in contact, that talking to him for long is depressing, and I find he has got the nickname among the subs of 'Jaundicy Carnegie'. Our surgeon says it is all hot climate and liver, and maybe it is, but it's sad to see such a good fellow and brave officer always picking out the mean motive or villainous intention of this and that, and going

about with a perpetual sneer on his face. He informed me at once that this place was 'a nest of savages, low English shopkeepers, Spanish cut-throats, and adventuresses'; yet he seems to have got on very comfortably in it, made any number of most pleasant and worthy friends, and received unlimited kindness and hospitality. His favourite bugbears at present, however, are the Admiral, against whose subtle spite he warns me daily (and who is the jolliest old fellow, and quite unconscious of Jem's animosity), and the three girls I mentioned in my last; but the rancour in the latter case may be owing to the fact that he was jilted (or thinks he was) by the eldest some time back, for which cause he denounces the whole family as worthless coquettes or worse, and is so energetic in warning me against the fascinations of the second, that one might almost think (but for the fickleness it would attribute to him) that he felt himself in danger of succumbing to them. He tells me, however, that the young lady is already engaged to a Spaniard; so if this is the case, and he has really singed his wings at the flame of her pretty blue eyes, his bitterness may be a case of 'sour grapes'; and I'm sorry for it, for she is really a simple, pretty-mannered, modest girl; and a good, sweet-natured wife would be the greatest blessing in life to poor old Jem, and no man would make a better husband. Truly

he's 'an ill lad', as wee Janie used to say, to quarrel with; but as a friend——"

There was a sudden, sharp crackling of paper, and Alice lifted up her head with a start. Perhaps she feared he was going to destroy the cherished letter which only a strong sense of duty had forced her to show to him; but though he had momentarily crushed the sheet together in his hand, the better and tenderer nature of the man made him smooth it out again directly afterwards, while he said in a strange, rough voice:

"So that was what Frank thought of me, eh? Aye; he didn't know *you* were the only woman I ever really loved, that my infatuation for that Liz Hardy was only the weakness of a reckless fool, who hadn't been able to win what he wanted, and so let himself be enslaved by the witcheries of a cold-blooded coquette; but as for even thinking of that other one—that slip of a girl!—like you indeed!"

"Max thinks she is, too," said Alice gently, "but of course it is the merest flattery of affection to say so to me."

"You think so? And you agree with Frank, I suppose? You adopt his opinions, poor foolish fellow, though——" but again he was interrupted, this time with a firmness which he understood.

"No, Captain Carnegie, I do not agree with him, because

I cannot even imagine the love—any love, however slight, which is worthy of a brave man—finding satisfaction, because unappreciated, in wreaking a cruel and disproportionate vengeance on a helpless girl, shaking her husband's confidence in his wife, depriving her of a sister's love, and ruining the happiness of a new home. This is what you have tried to do, Captain Carnegie, and I cannot thank or honour you for it, though I do both honour and thank you for your faithful friendship and devotion to my poor Frank. As to the manner of his death" (she could not help shivering a little, though she tried hard to repress it), "and your opinion of my sister-in-law's character, what I wish to say now is, that with these words of his before me—I do not *want* to know—I will never ask, or even listen to anything more respecting them either now, or at any future time. I will not even discuss them. To me she is, as I say, my brother's wife, a stranger in a strange land, away from all her own friends, and therefore needing the kindness which once ——" She stopped abruptly. The door had opened, and her eyes had already caught a glimpse of that fatal envelope, whose arrival had twice already to-day caused her such intense agitation. The message this time was the shortest of the three.

"Erlscourt has seen her. Come by next train. I will meet you."

"Thank God!" was the inward cry of her heart as she sprang up at once, and held out her hand to the half-angry, half-abashed sailor. "Good-bye," she said gently. "If you are the friend I have always found you, Captain Carnegie, that I *want* to find you still, you will forgive what I have said to-day; and for his sake, who never had an unkind thought of any one, will try to forget this painful story in future, and by doing so help me to forget it also."

Max was waiting on the platform when his sister arrived, and it was with difficulty that she repressed an exclamation of shocked concern at witnessing the change which even these few hours had made in his handsome young face, withering all its warm colour and brightness, and making it fevered, old, and haggard-looking; but his eyes were glittering with the brightness derived from this first gleam of hope on his anxious search, and he hastened to explain how it had come to him.

"I had gone into the club to snatch a mouthful of food after my fruitless visits to the hotel and our old lodgings. I made sure I shouldn't find a soul there, town being so empty; but just then Erlscourt came in, burst into exclamations at seeing me, asked when we came up to town, and how long we were staying for, and declared he had been

quite taken by surprise at seeing Mrs. Lorimer at Waterloo that morning, and looking *so* ill, too. He did hope she hadn't thought him rude; but he had been obliged to rush away from her to put a young cousin of his into the train, and when he turned back she had disappeared. Alice, I could almost have strangled him at the thought that he had been so near her, and *let* her disappear! But I had to appear calm; to affect indifference; not even to ask questions which would arouse suspicion, or sound queer; and all I got out of him was that she had on her grey cloak still, and that she said she had only called at the station to make an inquiry. There had been no time for more; the train was just starting. What do *you* think of it?"

"That something—thank God for it!—has occurred to make her change her first hasty thought, and turn her mind to those who she must have remembered were still left to love her. She is trying to go back to South America. Is not Waterloo the terminus for Southampton?"

"Yes, and the River Plate mail starts from Southampton; though—thank Heaven!—not till the ninth, four days off. But, Alice, suppose she was frightened by seeing Erlscourt, and decided to wait another opportunity. She may be in town still."

"Could not the guard tell you?"

"He hasn't returned yet. They tell me he managed to get his shoulder jammed between a truck and a carriage-door down there, and won't be well enough to take the down journey till to-morrow; and no one else noticed her in the crowd. Alice, the idea that she may still be wandering about London alone, weak and wretched (Erlscourt couldn't get her looks out of his mind; he declared he thought it was her ghost at first, and begged me to take her to Cannes), half maddens me. My poor girl—with her beautiful face, and utter ignorance of the wretches who infest the streets here; the vice, the——what *shall* I do?"

"Stay here till the guard returns to-morrow morning, and, meanwhile, have the down-platform watched before the starting of each train," said Alice promptly. "Dear Max, you are looking so ill yourself. If you could only take a little rest."

But Max laughed at this. "*Rest*," when his wife might be wandering about the slums of this great city, exposed to a thousand dangers, a thousand pitfalls! The idea was absurd! and though he did insist on his step-sister going to bed, he spent the night himself prowling up and down the streets in the neighbourhood of Waterloo, peering under railway-arches, questioning policemen, taking his first great trouble as the young do, unsparingly and *aux bras ouverts*, and being on the platform as soon as the gates were open in

the morning, with a face more haggard and ghastly than ever. Mid-day brought comfort, however, to both him and Alice. The anxiously-waited-for guard was able to identify the description of Lil with a young lady who had gone down to Southampton in the train which was about to start when Lord Erlscourt parted from her. He remembered her particularly because she staggered and seemed faint on first getting out of the railway-carriage at her journey's end; and when he got her a glass of water, she thanked him in a foreign accent, and asked him if it was far to the docks. She had the prettiest face he ever saw. It was just before his accident. Max gave the man a sovereign, and by three o'clock he and his sister were in the train, and skimming southwards in pursuit.

It was not till then that Alice told him of her interview with Captain Carnegie, and read him those passages from her lover's letters which, with the tender loyalty of her nature, she had determined to take, and to make Lil's husband take, as the guarantee of his young wife's innocence; and she was glad she did, for only by his almost fierce excitement at the recital did she realise that, with all his hatred of Carnegie, his remorse for his own conduct, and his anxiety for his wife, he had never yet glanced at the thought that she might be wholly guiltless of the charges laid against her; and even

yet, after the first shock of joy, he seemed hardly able to credit it, or take comfort from the thought.

"Our happiness is over, anyhow. If she did once love me, she will never do so any more. We were fools to think she cared so much for me as to drown herself for my anger. You see yourself she had only thrown me off——Well, well, accepted my throwing *her* off, if you like it better, and turned her face back to her own home. Perhaps she will refuse to return to me. Why not?"

"Max! Max! you are unjust. Trouble and tiredness have clouded your eyes, or you would not talk of Lil's not loving you. Show her that you love and trust her, and you will see that her love for you has never changed."

"Of course I love her. I did all along. I believe I should, if she had stabbed a man herself; but as to trust—suppose some other backbiting brute springs a fresh revelation on me! Remember, Carnegie isn't the only one who has thought queerly of her. They snubbed her in London—the women, I mean—because of the things she did; and she didn't care. She didn't seem to, at any rate. She said herself that she liked men better; and Laura Fantale said something chaffingly to me one day about her affection for Erlscourt. It was a damned, insolent lie, for she was just the same to him as to other fellows; but—but you know yourself that she is

different from other girls in that way. Most of them—the modest ones, at any rate—*pretend* to something like shyness with men whom they are not intimate with; but——"

"I know that to Lil, who has grown up far more among men than women, such shyness would be affected and absurd; and I have seen enough of her to know that she is far too frank and ingenuous to affect anything she does not feel."

"And yet she deceived me—me and you too about that affair."

"She concealed it—yes; but one concealment is not a proof of deceit, Max. Perhaps even you have not told her everything in your life; and though I acknowledge that it was wrong of her to keep this back, I think she may have done it because—forgive me, dear—you had not taught her to feel implicit trust in you; to feel sure that you would feel with and understand her. I have often noticed that she is very sensitive and timid."

"Timid! A girl who would sit down, as I've seen her, among a dozen drinking and swearing sheep-farmers; who could horsewhip a man for kissing—— Bah! I didn't mean to tell you of that. I have never alluded to it even to her till the other night; but that any one should have been able to tell it, and of my wife!"

"Why not, Max? What shame is it to your wife? though, indeed, *horsewhipping* is rather a harsh term to apply to a blow with a whip inflicted in a childish spurt of disgust."

Max stared at his sister stupidly.

"Childish! What do *you* mean? How have you heard anything about it?"

"From Lil herself, if you are alluding to her striking a rude, ill-bred man across the face with her whip when she was a little girl of ten years old, and on a visit to your friends, the Logans. She was ashamed of it herself, and said Mrs. Logan made her so miserable by laughing and joking her about it that she used to cry herself to sleep. Indeed, she only told me the incident to explain why, in after life, she could never look on that lady as a motherly person to be confided in; but, for my part, I rather admired the child for having spirit enough to defend her own dignity. The man was rightly punished."

Max started up, his worn face flushing.

"A child of ten years old! Was she only that? But Mrs. Logan said—— No, she didn't say when it happened; but I took it for granted it was after she was grown up. And those other stories, too! I hated to hear them at the time. I almost hated her for being the heroine of them;

and yet she was so lovely, she looked so unlike them, I couldn't help loving her. I felt as if she had bewitched me. I never knew what to think, and now—— Alice, you have made me more miserable than ever."

"I hope not, dear brother. What I want is to make you feel that, in finding Lil and winning her back, you are winning a wife worthy of honour as well as love. I always knew you *loved* Lil, but—I will tell you the truth—I have often thought you did not appreciate her."

They had reached Southampton at last; and confident as Max was of the date of the mail-steamer's departure, he could not be prevented from going down to the docks first of all to make sure of it. The next journey was to the police-station, to make inquiries and engage the services of a skilled detective for finding out poor Lil's whereabouts; and after that there was nothing to do but to go to a hotel and wait as patiently as might be; an effort which, in Max's state of feverish anxiety, was quite beyond him. He spent the greater part of the evening wandering about the streets as he had done in London, and only returned a little before midnight to find Alice with her bonnet and cloak on, and with her the detective he had employed, waiting for him. The latter came forward quickly.

"I've found her, sir," he said. "It's been an easier job

than I thought; though it's well I asked you for her maiden name, for they call her Mrs. Hardy, not Lorimer, at the place where she is. It's one of the lodging-houses near the docks: a respectable one, if nothing better, and I dare say she thought she'd get away more easily from there. But there's no fear of her getting away anywhere for long enough now."

"Why not? What do you mean?" Max asked hoarsely. He was quite dazed and staggered by the sudden relief coming after his long suspense; but Alice had drawn nearer to him, and as she put her hand on his arm he saw that she was very pale, and that her eyes were full of tears.

"She is very ill, Max dear," said his sister gently. "The woman at the lodgings said she was—taken so the night she came there. They are even afraid—— Oh! let us go to her at once. Don't let us lose time."

There was a cab at the door. The detective got on the box, and they drove to the place he had described without another word being spoken on the way. Only to Max's impatience the few minutes consumed in the journey seemed an hour, and when they drew up at last in front of a dingy, poor-looking house, he almost fell in his hurry to alight. There was a woman standing at the door, apparently on the watch for them, and she looked curiously at him, asking:

"Are you the young woman's husband, sir?" Then, as he

answered with an almost inarticulate affirmative: "Well, I'm glad of it; for I'm sure it's been hard times for *me*, and not knowing who she belonged to, or anything. She's in the back-room on the ground-floor; but you'd better wait in the parlour, and let the lady go in first if she will, for the poor thing's so far gone the doctor said even a loud voice might finish her. This way, please, and take care. You'll excuse its bein' dark; but my hands have been that full I've had no time to think o' lighting the gas."

She said this in a whisper as she led the way into a small, stuffy, front parlour, only lit by the street-lamp opposite and one long red gleam from an inch of open doorway leading into an inner room: a room whence a low, inarticulate moaning could be faintly heard.

"Yes, that's her," said the woman, as Alice uttered a low sound of distressed inquiry. "She's been going on that way ever since nine o'clock this morning: not a wink of sleep, and the doctor thinks as she'll only stop when she goes off from exhaustion. *I'm* dead beat, I know. I was up all last night, for the child wasn't born till five o'clock in the morning, and she'd been awful bad before. Yes, sir, that's it. It didn't live half-an-hour—come afore its time, the doctor said, and I was obliged to put it there till my man could go round and see about a coffin."

Max was standing by a small table with something on it, a tiny bundle covered with a white cloth, and his hand had touched it accidentally; but even with the first contact he snatched it away shudderingly, and, dropping into a chair, covered his face. Before the woman had spoken, something—some inward voice, told him what it was—*his own first-born child, and . . dead!*

CONCLUSION.

"As for her,
She hasteth to a land that hath no need
Of changing sun and moon. I hold her close
With my strong arm; but she will find a way
To pass from me . . . . . appealing to me,
'Suffer me to go' . . . . . ."

Author of 'Ezekiel.'

"As gold is tried in the fire,
So the heart . . . . . ."—*A. Proctor.*

How long had it been going on? How many days and nights had Alice Duncan watched and knelt by the narrow bed on which lay all that was left of poor, pretty Lil? at times trying in vain to soothe the ceaseless, restless movements of that burning head, from which nearly all its wealth of golden hair had been ruthlessly cropped; at times watching with hushed and terrible anxiety the motionless, scarcely-breathing form in those long fits of stupor, which succeeded to the previous wanderings, each of which left her weaker, frailer, nearer death; from each of which it seemed less possible that she could revive, than the one before.

Every day the doctor had said: "This will be the last. She can never get through it;" and yet every morning found her still alive, still rambling on in low, incoherent murmurs, so feeble, so piteous, so eloquent of the weary frame and broken heart that had brought her where she was, that it needed all of even Alice Duncan's resolution to sit there and listen to them. Sometimes it was only the repetition over and over again of the plaintive reproach, "Max, Max, Max, how could you! How *could* you!" Sometimes a more terrible phrase, "The *water*—I must go to it. A deep place . . . but it is deeper at the docks: deep, and so black!" followed by a wild, pitiful cry, "No! no, *not* my child! Murder! That would be murder! Oh! Liz, Liz, Liz! save me."

Once her eyes, closed generally from utter weakness, opened suddenly on Alice's tender, pitying face, and she said in a frightened whisper:

"*You!* Have you too come to blame me? But it was not my fault. Go and ask him. He was good. He will tell you. And I thought you were like him: that you would understand."

"He has told me, darling. I do understand; and you are good too. No one will blame you any more," Alice said, clearly and softly, her loving eyes looking straight into those

strained and hazy ones, her cool hands pressed upon the burning fingers, which clutched and clutched, and closed on nothing. But the heavy lids fell again, and the poor fevered head recommenced its restless turning. She could not tell if she had really been recognised, and her words understood or not.

On the ninth day, however, came a change. The night before had been the worst yet passed; the lapses of unconscious stupor lasting longer, and presenting so death-like an appearance that more than once they thought the breathing had stopped altogether, and the tortured, worn-out spirit passed away without one farewell word, one dying look for the husband and sister bending over her. Towards morning, however, she rallied quite suddenly, took without any resistance the nourishment, the constant administration of which had hitherto been extremely difficult both for Alice and the nurse who shared her duties; and almost immediately afterwards—fell asleep, for the first time in all those weary days! They could hardly believe it themselves at first; and Alice, creeping out to the parlour to carry Max the news, fairly broke down (she had never done so before), and could only put her arms round his neck and cry.

Poor Max had spent those nine days almost entirely in the dingy little front parlour, with its one small window, half

obscured by a wire-blind, and looking out on muddy quays, tangles of spars and rigging, groups of loud, hoarse-voiced sailors, and glittering water. Once acquainted with the main facts of the case (as perforce he had to be), the doctor had sternly forbidden him to enter his wife's room, lest the shock of a recognition should finish the work which fever, exposure, and unhappiness had so nearly completed; so that, except at rare intervals, when she was lying in a state of insensibility too deep for fear of disturbance, he had not seen her; and the acute distress produced in him by each of these brief glimpses was so overwhelming that several times his sister implored him not to give way to the temptation of them; and to take care of himself, if only for Lil's sake, and on the chance of her recovery. But to Max, who had never been so near death in life before, the very word "recovery" seemed but a cruel mockery; and except on the one occasion when he followed the coffin of that little dead baby, which represented so many proud hopes and fond imaginings, to the tiny grave in which they were to be buried, he never left the house once, or snatched more than half-an-hour's sleep at a time on the hard horse-hair sofa, where he passed most of his anxious watch.

Now, however, at this first word of comfort, hope sprang up vividly in him; and it was almost by force that he was

kept from his wife's bedside, aided by the information that even now Lil was more likely to pass away in her sleep than to wake from it; and that the faintest noise, an unguarded sob, or an unexpected face, could have but one effect, and that a fatal one.

So every sound was hushed in the dingy lodging-house, whence all the other lodgers had been removed long ago, and the watchers waited on until nearly sundown, when Lil's eyes opened for the first time, and fixed themselves without any sign of surprise on Alice's face.

Neither spoke. In that first moment of suspense Miss Duncan simply dared not run the risk of a word; and Lil's eyes, hollow as blue sea-flowers shining from some ocean cave, dwelt on her with the pathetic solemnity of a child which is hurt too badly for cries. After a minute, however, she whispered:

"I knew . . . . it was you . . . . You came to find me."

Alice bent nearer, pressing her lips to the short, waving locks, their glittering gold so limp and dank now, as she answered, in soft full tones, scarcely louder than the invalid's, but infinitely clear and tender:

"Yes, dear, and I found you. Did you not feel I should? But you were naughty to run away. You might have known

I would take care of you, my little sister. Drink this now, and don't talk."

She was holding a cup to the sick girl's lips, and Lil obeyed her as if mechanically; but even that little exertion exhausted her; and murmuring very feebly:

"Don't leave me . . . Stay till" . . . . her eyes closed, and she fell asleep again. The doctor put his fingers on her wrist.

"Terribly weak," he said, "a mere thread; but at least there is no more fever. It is only a chance—the ghost of a chance—but she *may* pull through even yet."

The chance dwindled, and strengthened and dwindled again with cruel inconsistency during the next thirty-six hours. She slept and woke again, and submitted to be fed at intervals, sometimes seeming to know Alice, and sometimes murmuring a few words, though too low and brokenly for their meaning to be fully intelligible; but it was bright morning on the second day, before her sister-in-law, still patiently watching, saw a more natural colour dawning over the sleeping face; and when at last the eyes opened there was a brightness in them not seen before. It seemed to grow clearer at the sight of Alice, and she said, rather less feebly now:

"You . . . . did stay. You have been with me all the time. How tired . . . . you must be! How good you are!"

"It is not good to nurse you, dear Lil," said Alice tenderly; "I like it." Lil's sunken eyes filled with tears.

"Have you forgiven me then?" she whispered, her lips trembling a little; but when Alice pressed her own to them and answered:

"There is nothing for me to forgive. It was not your fault, but God's will, that brought you to have a part in my grief. I love you all the better for it. I am *so* sorry for you, Lil," a look that was not a smile, rather a wave of great relief and peace, came over the white face, and the sisters kissed one another lovingly. But after that the brightness passed, and there was a long silence, while the sparrows and finches kept up a constant chirping among the red leaves of the Virginian creeper in the little back-garden, and Alice sat trembling for the next question. It came at last, sudden, piteous, with long, half-conscious, ever-present sense of a need withheld: a foreshadowed void.

"*I want my baby!* . . . . *It cried* . . . What have you done with it?"

Some women might have hesitated or prevaricated; but Alice Duncan knew better. She knelt down and took this poor young mother's head to her own warm heart, folding her arms closely round her.

"Our dear Lord has taken it to keep for you, love. It is

safe with my mother and yours, and poor Frank—safe in the bosom of the Father."

There was no answer at first; but even though she could feel the warm tears trickling down, she did not think she had done wrong; and after a while of most tender soothing, Lil said pitifully:

"I did not kill it. It was myself I meant. . . . I went by the river a long way. There is a pool. . . . I threw the desk in first. I was going . . . . but I had forgotten; and when I saw *it* . . . . in Lisbeth's arms, I knew . . . . I *could* not." Her voice died for a moment in a tearless sob, and went on again: "And it *was* my fault . . . . the other. If I had never been thoughtless or flirted with Don Pedro, he . . . . he might have come back; he . . . . But if God has taken mine in payment, it is just. I . . I must not cry. Oh! my baby! *my baby!*"

But she did cry then, bitterly, and Alice with her. It was many hours before she recovered the ground lost; and yet, when told of it, the doctor said he had expected worse consequences, and that Miss Duncan had managed wonderfully.

All this time Lil had never once mentioned her husband's name, and for this reason he was still forbidden to see her; but it went to Alice's heart to see how he suffered under the

prohibition, and to mark his haggard face peering wistfully in at the half-open door when his wife's face was turned the other way; and she was rejoiced when, on the second day after this, Lil asked her:

"Alice—what was that the doctor said to you just now?"

"That you were decidedly better, darling, and he was beginning to have good hopes of you. Why, Lil, you are not crying at that, are you? You do not want to leave us?"

"I wanted . . . . to die," said Lil brokenly. "Since God took . . . . my baby, I thought He would take me too. He knows I have nowhere else to go now that Max does not want me; and . . and even my father might not. He was angry at my marrying. You are very good to me; but . . . . but . . . . I don't know *what* to do. If only I might die!" She was sobbing pitifully, and Alice took her in her arms.

"Max *does* want you, Lil. He is breaking his heart for want of you, there in the next room, where he has been through all your illness, watching over you, longing to be let come to you. It was he who found you, who followed and searched for you in London, everywhere, from the moment he found you had gone. Dear Lil, you have a noble, generous nature; but you have done wrong things now and then yourself, even though they were not very wrong. You will

not condemn poor Max, and refuse to forgive him, even though he has done far worse, and been cruel and unjust to the person nearest and dearest to him on earth; the person he loves better than any other. He does love you, darling; though when he was in a passion he said harsh, and brutal, and untrue things to you: things he did not mean; that he has repented bitterly of ever since. And oh! Lil dear, think how he has been punished! Think of what he felt when he saw his own little son—*his* son as well as yours—whose coming he had looked forward to so eagerly, laid in the grave; and knew that it was his passion and wrongdoing that had put him there, and brought you into such terrible danger. Lil, I have not dared to speak to you about him before. They would not let him come to you, lest it should agitate you; but you are stronger now, and if you would—— I think you will not know him; he is so changed, so old looking; even his bonny brown curls are thick with grey—oh, my dear, I hope I am not hurting you. I hope it was not wrong to say it."

For Lil was weeping almost passionately, and clinging to her, only by-and-bye she managed to sob out:

"I *do* want him so badly. I thought he had forsaken me."

* * * * * *

The sun was sinking in a perfect flood of gold over the Southampton Water, fringing with orange fire the purple woods and dusky heights of the Isle of Wight opposite, and making even the wet causeway gleam like polished marble. Faint cries of "Yo, heave, ho!" came pleasantly over the rippling amber wavelets from the shipping in the harbour. The sparrows and finches pecketted about, and scuttled down to rest among the loose red leaves of the creeper; and all nature seemed to be saying, "Good night, good night," in sweetest, calmest cadences when Max entered his wife's room.

There had been great preparations first, and he had been again and again cautioned not to say this or do that; to tell her that all had been explained to him; that she was entirely forgiven; above all, to be *very* calm, and not to let her cry.

But when this foolish young husband and wife met, there was no thought of caution or preparation, no explainings or forgiveness at all; for no sooner did Max see that sweet, colourless face, sweeter than ever in the firelight glow, and thin white hands stretched towards him, than he made one rush at them, and, falling on his knees, took the dear head to his breast, kissing her, caressing her, fondling and crying over her, all in a breath; while Lil drew her poor weak arms

round his neck, and laid her cheek against his, murmuring as they clung to one another:

"Poor Max!—my poor, poor Max! Oh, I am . . . . so sorry!"

THE END.

RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LONDON AND BUNGAY.